

# Malcolm Saville

## Treasure at Amorys



LONE PINE ADVENTURE

# Contents

[Foreword](#)

[Author's Acknowledgement](#)

[The Lone Pine Club](#)

[1. The Ballinger](#)

[2. Amorys](#)

[3. The Dream](#)

[4. The Smuggler's Rest](#)

[5. The Lone Piners Arrive](#)

[6. Lights in the Night](#)

[7. The Well-digger's Tale](#)

[8. The Siege](#)

[9. Ballinger Again](#)

[10. The Rescue](#)

[11. Treasure at Amorys](#)

# **Treasure At Amorys**

**Malcolm Saville**

First revised edition published in 1969 by William Collins Sons & Co. Ltd., London and Glasgow.

This edition was first published in Armada in 1970 by Fontana Paperbacks, 14 St. James's Place, London SW1A 1PS.

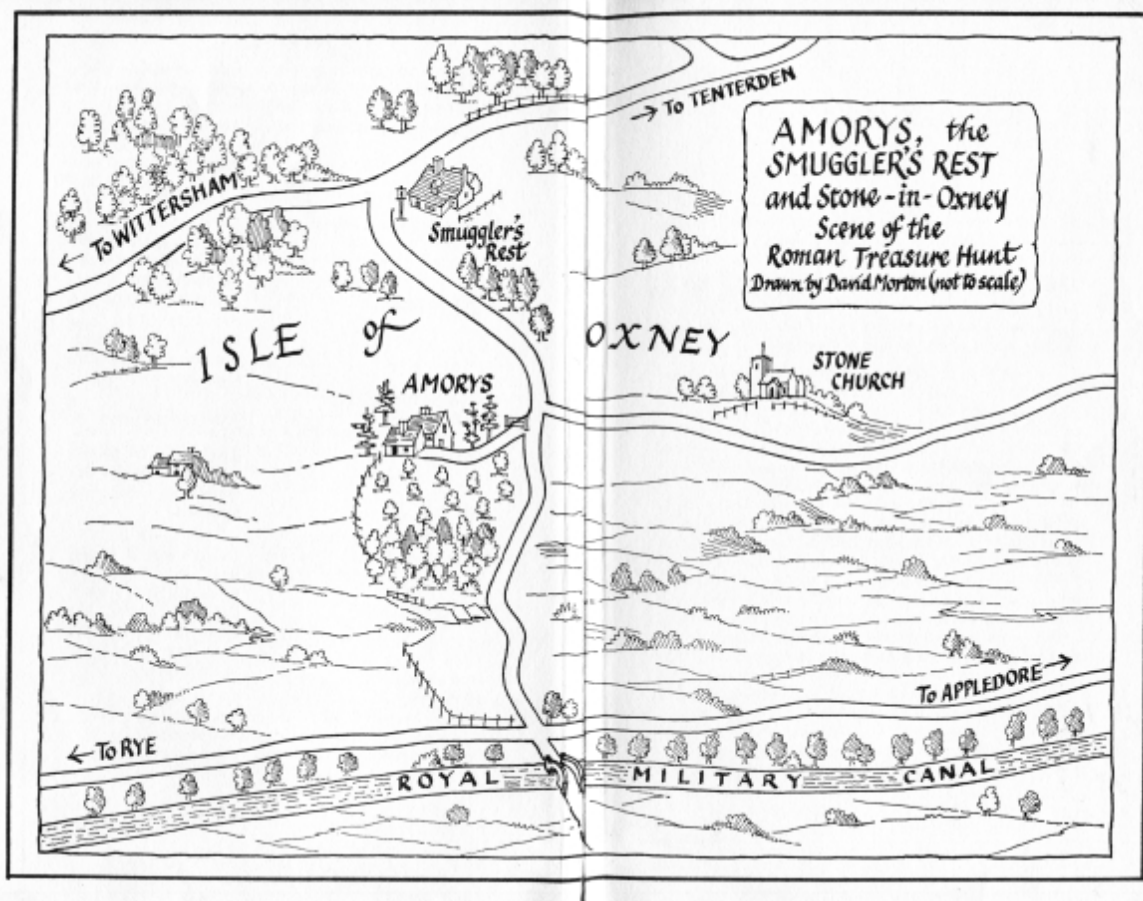
This impression 1978.

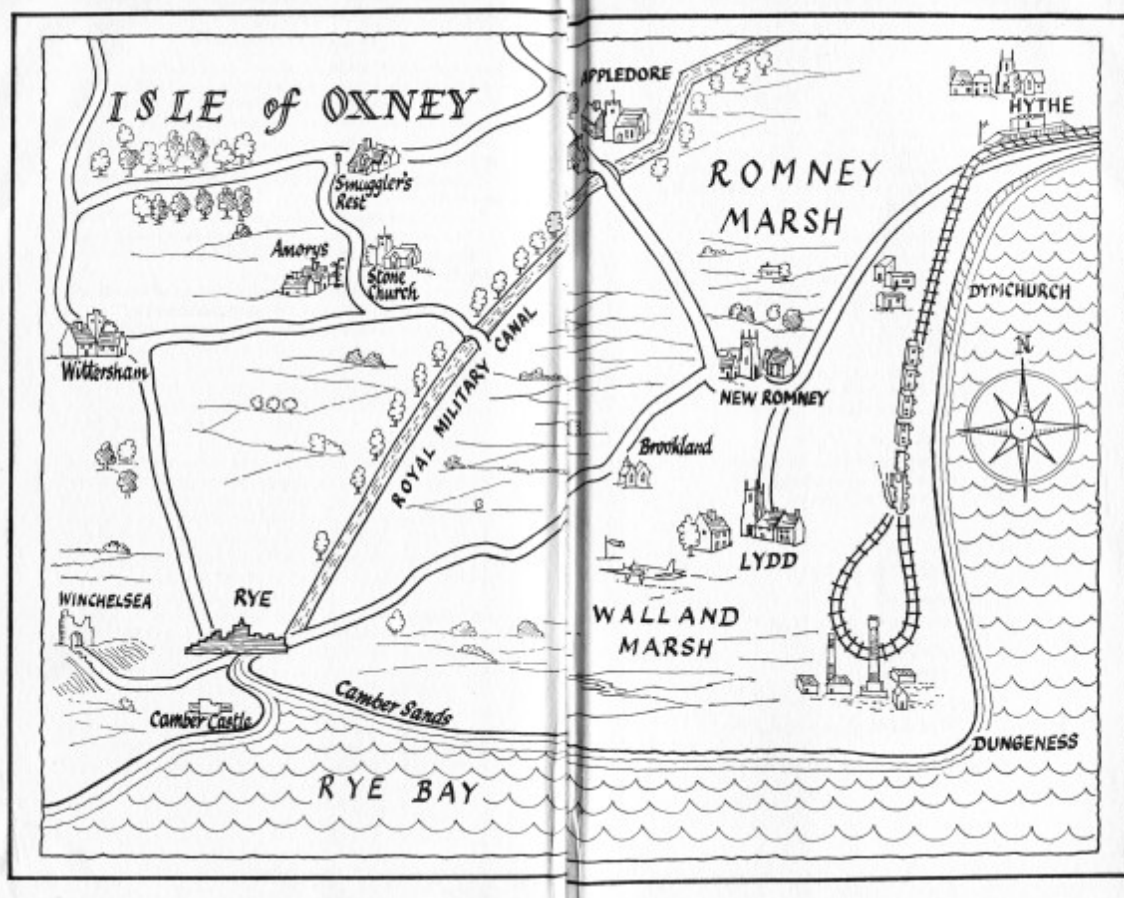
© Malcolm Saville.

Printed in Great Britain by Love & Malcomson Ltd., Brighton Road, Redhill, Surrey.

#### CONDITIONS OF SALE:

This book is sold subject to the condition that it shall not, by way of trade or otherwise, be lent, re-sold, hired out or otherwise circulated without the publisher's prior consent in any form of binding or cover other than that in which it is published and without a similar condition including this condition being imposed on the subsequent purchaser.





*To all Lone Piners everywhere*

## Foreword

This is the fifteenth adventure of the boys and girls who founded the Lone Pine Club and who call themselves the Lone Piners. Even if this is the first of the series you have read, you will find the story complete in itself.

All the Lone Piners' adventures are set in parts of Britain to which you can go yourself, and this is no exception. The scene is Romney Marsh - the little tract of land which is so unlike any other part of England that it has been called "the fifth quarter of the world". The Marsh - including Walland Marsh - stretches for about twenty miles from the ancient town of Rye in Sussex on the west, to Hythe in Kent on the east. It is never more than eight miles in depth but it is so flat that it appears to be very much bigger than it really is. The grass on which thousands of sheep graze is a rich green and just over the rim of the southern horizon is the sea which once, before the Romans came, covered this fertile little land.

You can see now where the waves lapped against cliffs behind the forgotten ports of Winchelsea and Rye, and farther east against the bluff of a whale-backed ridge called the Isle of Oxney. It is easy to see that this wooded little land was once an island when you look up at it from the road between Rye and Appledore and down to the Marsh from Oxney's two villages which are called Wittersham and Stone.

I first knew Romney Marsh as a boy and first read of the Romans and the worship of the heathen god, Mithras in Rudyard Kipling's story "On the Great Wall", in *Puck of Pook's Hill* (Published by Macmillan & Co., Ltd.) In Stone church today you can still see the Roman altar to Mithras, which was dug up from beneath the chancel over a hundred years ago and now is cemented into the floor of the belfry. It has probably been in Oxney for 1700 years. Soon after I came back to live in Sussex where I was born, I went again to Oxney and saw again the altar in the church of Stone and determined to write a story of today linked with a part of our history.

This is it, and because I am writing about a real place I must make it clear that everyone in the story is imaginary. There are no such people, and they



are not meant to be like anyone on the Isle of Oxney or Rye or anywhere else. There is no such house as Amorys, and although there is an old inn on Oxney which has a notice on the wall about the toll charges which the twins were quick to see, it is certainly not the Smuggler's Rest.

M. S.

## **Author's Acknowledgement**

The verse from a poem on page 14 from Rudyard Kipling's *Puck of Pook's Hill* is reprinted by permission of Mrs. George Bambridge, Macmillan & Co. Ltd., and the Macmillan Company of Canada Ltd.

# **The Lone Pine Club**

The Lone Pine Club was founded as a secret society at a lonely house called Witchend in a hidden valley of the Long Mynd in Shropshire. The first headquarters of the Club was in a clearing, marked by a solitary pine tree, on the slopes of this valley. The original rules of the Club are very simple and are set out in full in "Mystery at Witchend", which is the first story about the Lone Piners and was written over twenty years ago. Many readers have asked that the Lone Piners should not get any older from book to book, but others have felt that the characters should experience their adventures in the 1960's and you will find in this story some of them do.

There are now nine members of the Lone Pine Club, but it is not usual for them all to appear in one story. The following appear in this one:

JONATHAN (JON) WARRENDER - Age 17. When not away at school, lives with his widowed mother who runs and owns the Gay Dolphin Hotel in Rye.

PENELOPE (PENNY) WARRENDER - Jon's cousin aged 16. Her parents are abroad and she also lives at the Dolphin.

DAVID MORTON - Age 17. The leader and co-founder of the Lone Pine Club. Lives in London with his brother and sister -

RICHARD (DICKIE) AND MARY MORTON - Ten-year-old twins.

MACBETH - The Mortons' Scottie dog who long ago was made an honorary member.

*The other members are: -*

PETRONELLA (PETER) STERLING - David's special friend.

TOM INGLES AND JENNY HARMAN live in Shropshire, while the latest recruit, HARRIET SPARROW lives in London, but often spends holidays with her grandfather in Yorkshire.

*Mithras, God of the Midnight, here where the great Bull dies, Look on Thy children in darkness. Oh, take our sacrifice!*

*Many roads Thou hast fashioned - all of them lead to the Light!*

*Mithras, also a soldier, teach us to die aright!*

RUDYARD KIPLING

From *Puck of Pook's Hill*

# 1. The Ballinger

Number twenty-six Belmont Avenue in a south London suburb looked, from the outside, almost exactly like the other one hundred and thirty semi-detached houses in the same street. The only difference was that it was shabbier and the little front garden behind a straggling hedge of privet was neglected.

The postman rarely brought a letter to this house, the milkman called but every other day and only occasionally was a line of washing seen in the back garden which was a tangle of weeds. The young children of Belmont Avenue said that a fat old witch lived in number twenty-six - a witch who only went out at night on a broomstick because she was busy all day making spells. Some of the mothers had tried to be neighbourly and friendly to the lonely Mrs. Cartwright, but nobody had ever been asked inside number twenty-six, and the untidy old woman who hardly ever spoke to anybody soon became a mystery.

People often gossip about someone they do not understand, and it was not long before there were all sorts of rumours circulating about Emma Cartwright who, truth to tell, never gossiped and never did any harm to anybody in Belmont Avenue. Some said that she was an unhappy widow; others that her husband had left her and who could blame him. Mrs. Bates, a kindly woman who lived at number twenty-four next door, was convinced that her neighbour was in trouble and had a secret in her life. Time and time again Mrs. Bates had talked to her over the garden fence and offered help and friendship. But her neighbour had only peered at her through thick-lensed spectacles, thanked her vaguely and made an excuse to go indoors. There were others who suggested that she was simple - and they were certainly wrong - and some, much nearer the mark, who said that a woman as unfriendly and secretive as Emma Cartwright must have something to hide.

This was the truth. Cartwright was not the fat woman's real name, and it was not likely that she would wish her neighbours to know that she had been in prison, and had a bitter grudge against the world because she had

been found out and punished. She hated Belmont Avenue but was using it, as a spider uses its web, as a hiding place while she plotted and planned for the future. It is sometimes difficult to believe that there are people as lazy and as wicked as this woman, whose real name was Ballinger. But there are such people, and this story starts on a sunny morning towards the end of July when the postman made one of his rare visits to number twenty-six Belmont Avenue.

The Ballinger, as we will now call her, was in her kitchen boiling herself an egg for breakfast, when she heard the postman's tread and the click of the letter-box. There were only a few people who knew her address, and although she was curious she did not go into the hall until the sand in the egg-timer had run through and she had taken the egg from the saucepan. Then she waddled to the door, picked up her letter and, pushing her glasses up her forehead, she peered at the handwriting. She recognized it but did not open the envelope until she had eaten her egg. She was as greedy as well as a mean woman and among other weaknesses was one for strawberry jam. She looked at the large jar on the table longingly, then helped herself liberally. Munching a mouthful of bread and jam she started to read the letter. It was dated the previous day and written in a large, scrawling hand:

*Dear Aunt Em,*

*Soon after you read this you will be seeing me. It is very important for us to have a talk. Urgent too. I have been expecting to hear that you have got some plans for the future but we are not getting anywhere and I have had enough of my present job. I am bringing my fiance Les Dale and as it may be difficult to tell you about him when he is with us you had better know that he is very clever. Very. He has been at the University and knows a lot of history and has just discovered, near a place we know, the way of making a lot of money. A lot. Trouble is that we need money and we will have to be quick before anybody else gets on to this. If Les hadn't been so smart we wouldn't have this chance which must not be missed. I have told Les about you and he agrees that considering what we have done together in the past now is the time for you to help us and if we are lucky then you can get out of the hole you are now living in and settle down decently again. So we are giving you this chance to come in with us and will give you our confidence*

*too. But you will have to think of a way of raising some money quickly. We will be with you about dinner time and I hope you will give Les a decent meal as he is very fussy about what he has to eat.*

*Yours*

V.

The Ballinger was so perturbed by this letter that she forgot to spread strawberry jam on a second slice of bread. A dull flush spread up her neck to her puffy cheeks as she considered not only the impertinence of the girl Valerie, whom she usually described as her niece, but also the barely concealed threat behind the demand for money. She had been glad to be rid of Valerie for a time while she planned for a future which would not necessarily include this girl who knew too much about her own past.

Then she poured herself another cup of tea and began to think. She had no doubt that Valerie would bring her young man this morning, and she knew too that their arrival would cause a lot more gossip in Belmont Avenue. She knew she was talked about but until now had been too lazy to make any effort to be sociable. She had thought that the fewer people who knew about her the better, but perhaps now the time had come to put on an act, for the one thing Valerie did not say in her letter was how much she had told Les Dale about their past association. She could not imagine Valerie being unselfish enough to marry anyone, and so it might really be true that this man was clever and actually had found a way of making easy money. It was all rather difficult because she had got out of the way of making decisions since she had been living down here in seclusion.

She peered at the loudly-ticking clock on the dresser and realized she had not much time to tidy up and prepare her neighbours for the sight of a pretty niece and her new fiance. She was also sure that until she was able to form her own opinion about Les Dale, it might be as well to act the benevolent but poor aunt down on her luck.

She tidied up the kitchen and hid the jar of strawberry jam at the back of the cupboard. She certainly was not going shopping for her visitors who would have to make do with what she had. She was not bringing out the jam either.

Then she went upstairs, attended to her straggling grey hair and made herself look rather more respectable. From the window she saw her neighbour in her garden, and deciding that Mrs. Bates would agree that there is no time like the present she went down to see her. It was difficult to force her way through the thistles and weeds, and not particularly easy to open a conversation considering how she had snubbed Mrs. Bates in the past, but the Ballinger was a clever woman when she liked to take the trouble.

"Good morning, Mrs. Bates," she said in her deep voice. "I hope you don't mind me interrupting you, but when I saw you from my window I was reminded that I owe you an apology."

Mrs. Bates was so surprised that she dropped a clothes peg she had been holding in her mouth.

"And good morning to you, Mrs. Cartwright. An apology, did you say?"

"Yes, Mrs. Bates, I've been worried about all these thistles. I know how hard Mr. Bates works in his garden of an evening and of a Sunday and these thistles must be a real nuisance to him with their seeds. I'm not very strong, Mrs. Bates - I've never really been myself since my dear husband died - and I just can't get down to work in the garden... I'm sure you understand, don't you, dearie?"

Mrs. Bates, with mouth still open, nodded. She could find no words to deal with this extraordinary situation.

"I knew you would, my dear," the widow Cartwright continued. "You've always been that kind and sympathetic, and I hope you'll tell Mr. Bates that I hope to get my little garden cleared up soon. I've had some good news this morning, dear."

She moved towards the fence and bit back a very rude word as a trailing bramble tore her stocking and scratched her leg. Mrs. Bates moved forward on her side, just as pleased to receive a confidence as her misunderstood neighbour was to give it.

"Yes, Mrs. Bates, I'm a lonely, unhappy woman but I'm going to have a wonderful surprise today. I've had a letter from my only niece, Valerie. Such a pretty girl she is, dear. Smart and bright and in a good job. I've never been blessed with little ones of my own, Mrs. Bates. A great sorrow to me and my dear late husband that we were childless. But Valerie has always had time for her old auntie and she would have been to see me before but she's been working way up in Scotland..."

"Fancy!" said Mrs. Bates as the Ballinger paused for breath. "Fancy that. Scotland is a long way."

"But now what do you think, Mrs. Bates. Valerie is coming to see me this very morning and she's bringing her young man to meet me for the very first time. Engaged to him she is, dear, and her letter tells me all about him. A clever young man. Quite the scholar, I hear. University, Mrs. Bates, and Valerie says that this won't be their only visit and that maybe they'll come and help their lonely old aunt in her house and garden."

"Fancy that!" said Mrs. Bates. "How lovely for you, Mrs. Cartwright."

"Yes dear. And I'd like to bring them in to see you later on. Or perhaps you could bring Mr. Bates in this evening to have a cup of tea or coffee with us, if Valerie and Leslie can stay until your hubby gets home... We'll see, shall we, Mrs. Bates? I did so want you to share my good news. Now I must pop in and get ready for my guests... Goodbye for the present. I'll let you know if they're going to stay the evening. I do so hope they will."

She stepped back with what she fondly hoped was a happy smile and the bramble attached itself to her other leg.

"Very kind of you, I'm sure," Mrs. Bates replied. "Very kind and neighbourly and I hope you'll be happy in your meeting," and she too turned and hurried indoors forgetting in her haste to spread the news of Mrs. Cartwright's visitors up and down Belmont Avenue, that there was still more washing to go on the line.

Meanwhile the Ballinger cursed both the bramble and Mrs. Bates, believing that the latter was really responsible for the havoc caused by the former.



Then she went indoors to lay her plans for a situation she had not expected just over an hour ago.

Her guests arrived soon after twelve in an old car. She was watching for them from an upstairs window and noticed that the young man did not get out first to open the door for his fiancée. Valerie was already on the pavement when he condescended to appear and looked with what seemed to be a sneer up at number twenty-six. The Ballinger did not really blame him for this because she hated the place herself, but it was difficult to judge the size of the sneer because Mr. Dale was disguised by a beard and sidewhiskers. Valerie, she noticed, looked as smart and pretty as usual. She did not think she was going to like Les, but before she went down to open the door she noticed that the curtain of number twenty-four's bedroom window was shaking - probably with as much excitement as that of Mrs. Bates herself!

Valerie, who was usually tough and unemotional was obviously nervous when the Ballinger opened the door.

"Hello, Aunt Em," she said quickly, in a bright, hard voice. "You got my letter I see. I've brought Les to meet you. Les, this is my Aunt Em I told you about."

It was a narrow hall and Les pushed past his fiancée to get in. Then he looked the Ballinger up and down rather insolently and said, "Morning, Aunt Em. Don't mind if I call you Aunt Em, do you? I'm not sure of your other name."

"Good morning, Mr. Dale," the Ballinger said coldly. "Although you're well in you'd better come further in to the front room, but please don't push past me. I'm bigger than Valerie and there might be an accident."

Valerie giggled nervously and when Les sat down he took a packet of cigarettes from his pocket. The Ballinger was sure that she was going to find it difficult to like anything about this objectionable young man. She also regretted her half promise to Mrs. Bates. Les must be hidden rather than displayed!

As he puffed smoke into the room and lit a cigarette for Valerie, the Ballinger looked at him more closely. Apart from the gingery beard and long, untidy hair he looked scruffy. His hands were dirty and his nails bitten, but she noticed that his eyes were bright and intelligent. Even if he did not like a razor or soap and water the Ballinger was sure that Valerie's friend was no fool. It was possible of course that he was putting on an act, but so was she.

It seemed as if Valerie was following her unspoken thoughts for she suddenly looked up and said:

"Look here, Aunt. We haven't got a lot of time so we'd better get down to business. I couldn't explain our plan in full in my letter because we only decided yesterday to have you in on this and I wanted to catch the post."

"Very good of you, dear," the Ballinger said, waving tobacco smoke away from her face. "Most thoughtful, but you made yourself reasonably clear. Even a stupid old woman like me gathered that you wanted a lot of money in a hurry. I'm still wondering why you've suddenly picked on me. You should know that I have no money. Do you think I should go on living in this delightful spot if I had?"

Valerie walked over to the window.

"I'm not so sure. You always were a sharp one. I think you have got money tucked away somewhere, and anyway I'm sure you could put your hands on some to invest if you knew you were going to get a good return - without working either."

"I don't know what you're talking about, my dear. I have no money, but I should have thought that you had. You've been earning, I imagine? You look as if you had and why should you want to do me a good turn now? You've not been near me for months. And Mr. Dale I'm sure is a very busy man and I can't see why he's wasting his time here. You may stay to lunch if you like. It's corned beef and I should be glad if your young man would open the tin."

Valerie flushed with annoyance but Les lay back in his chair and blew a smoke ring up to the ceiling.

"Chuck it, Aunt Em," he grinned. "No need to put on an act with us. Val has told me about you and some of your little escapades. Maybe she hasn't told all but I know you've worked well together in the past, and we think you might be useful in the business we're contemplating now. May as well be frank with each other from the start, so please don't pretend that you're a reformed character. We know you're living in this place until something turns up. We don't suppose you'd like the police to know who you really are, but Val thinks that it's worth getting you in on this business and I'm willing to give you a share of the earnings - if you earn anything."

He got up and stretched.

"And if there's one type of food I detest more than another it's corned beef. If that's the best you can do you'd better come out with us and we'll find somewhere to get a decent meal."

"That's a good idea," Valerie agreed quickly. "Come with us, Aunt. Our treat. There's nothing mean about Les and, as he says, you can stop putting on an act now and just be yourself. We'll take you in the car and after you've had something to eat and drink we'll tell you what Les has found out."

"Please yourself, o'course," Les shrugged. "I'm really only doing this for Val's sake, and if you don't want to invest we'll find someone else who will."

The Ballinger was not so sure. No doubt that these two were the smart ones. They would not have come here just for her sake so perhaps she had better play along. She did not see a chance of raising money for "investment", but there would be no harm in finding out what they were after.

"Very well," she agreed. "It's about time somebody took me out and you two can tell me what you're after. Might be safer too. No doubt my neighbour has got her ear to the wall this very minute. You might remember to go out looking like a happily engaged couple. I've been boasting about you both this morning."

Valerie laughed. "That's more like you, Auntie dear. I was beginning to think that you'd lost your touch, and we want your advice - along with some money of course. I wouldn't have written to you if I hadn't been as sure as I've been of anything that Les is on to something good. Let's go. This place depresses me."

"Me too," the Ballinger agreed. "I'll listen to what you've got to tell me, but I've not got much money left and that's the truth. I'm not investing... Now remember what I said when we get outside, and don't look up at the house next door. Mrs. Bates will be looking at you. She saw you arrive... And another thing, Leslie. Please remember your manners for once and hold the car door open for your fiancée and me. I've told the road that you're educated."

For a fleeting moment he looked embarrassed and then took Valerie's arm and led her out to the car. The Ballinger followed, looking rather like a large tramp steamer being towed into harbour by two tugs. Before she got into the back seat however, she turned and waved to the windows of number twenty-four and as they drove off she had the feeling that Mrs. Bates's curtains were not the only ones to be twitching in Belmont Avenue.

Les was not mean and although he too may have been investing, he bought them a good lunch at a hotel not far away. Throughout the meal he was rude and arrogant but Valerie really seemed to like him. This worried the Ballinger because it was soon obvious that the girl did not mind being ordered about by him. And it might be true that she had really told him far more about their previous association than she should have done. Nevertheless she was curious to hear what he had to propose.

After a meal they moved into a quiet corner of the hotel lounge for their coffee and Valerie got down to business.

"Les doesn't really like talking about himself, Aunt, and so I s'pose I ought to explain how clever he is before he tells you what he's discovered. I told you that Les has been to university. He's very clever and once he thought he might be an author. Then he wondered if he'd be a teacher. But there's no money in either of those jobs, and so now he's really using his brains. What he's interested in is history and most especially anything about the Romans.

The old Romans I mean, and Roman remains that you can dig up today. Also valuable treasures left by the Romans. In fact he's crazy about ancient Rome and the Romans, aren't you Les?"

He nodded agreement, passed his cup for more coffee and began to speak.

He talked well and the Ballinger found herself interested in spite of her instinctive dislike of him. He told them that probably never before in our history had people been so eager to find out about the Romans and what they had left behind in Britain from the first invasion by Julius Caesar fifty-five years before the birth of Christ until the last centurion left our shores about four hundred years later.

"Each year we find more examples of their wonderful work and craftsmanship. Not so long ago we found, and have now preserved, the remains of a Roman ship in the mud of the Thames at Blackfriars in London and in 1942 the greatest find of all was the famous Mildenhall Treasure which is now in the British Museum. I have always believed that there are other treasures like this to be found in Britain. Why not? And what matters is that such finds are almost beyond price."

"Have you found one?" the Ballinger asked quickly.

"Not yet, but I'm as sure as I can be that I'm on the track, and I may as well explain that the find of any such treasure may, by law, have to be reported. If it is declared Treasure Trove because the original owner cannot be found it becomes the property of the country and is usually bought by the British Museum. It is true that the finders are rewarded - two men ploughing a field found the Mildenhall Treasure - but obviously the thing to do is to buy any land or house that may have Roman treasure hidden under it and receive the reward... There is an alternative, of course."

He paused to light another cigarette and Valerie said, "See the idea, Aunt? Les has found a place where he is sure there is a treasure. *If we find it there's no real need to tell anybody is there?* Les is an expert. He knows where to look and what to look for. Roman coins, silver and gold ornaments and great plates and dishes of silver like the Mildenhall. Americans buy anything like that without asking questions. That's what we're after. A great

treasure. All we want is money to buy a shabby old house and grounds so that Les can really search for something he is sure he is going to find. If we can't get the money we shall have to get the owner out and that's what we want to talk to you about... What did you say, Les?"

"I said 'Shut up'. You're going too fast and anyway this is my story... I've been interested in Romney Marsh for some time. We know the Romans landed there and it's a fact that plenty of relics of their occupations have been found in many parts of Kent and Sussex. There's a bluff of higher land above the Marsh not very far from Rye called the Isle of Oxney... What did you say, Aunt Em?"

"Nothing special," the Ballinger said grimly. "You said near Rye, didn't you?"

Les looked surprised. "I did. Do you know it?"

"I do," said the Ballinger, looking meaningfully at Valerie as she realized that the girl had obviously not told Les of a time in Rye some years ago when they had been badly worsted by some children in a hunt for treasure (*The Gay Dolphin Adventure*). "I certainly do know Rye, but go on with your story. Why do you want money now?"

"Because I've found an old house on the Isle of Oxney where I'm sure there's a reasonable chance of finding an underground Roman temple dedicated to Mithras. Haven't time to tell you all about this now, but we know there was such a temple on Oxney because an altar stone has been found there and can be seen in the local church today... Anyway I know the chances are great in this area for a very important find. Val has seen a small silver spoon of mine which is undoubtedly Roman. It was picked up by an Oxney boy on the field belonging to this house when he was looking for plovers' eggs in the spring. I've talked to this boy and bought the spoon from him... This house which is called Amorys is built on the old cliff only a couple of hundred yards from where the sea once broke on the beach below. I've no doubt that Roman ships once landed there. I've been in the fields below the house which is owned by an old fool called Major Bolshaw. People who call themselves majors make me mad. Anyway his wife died not long ago and as he lives there alone, he's got to be persuaded

to sell cheap so that we can move in and I can search for this temple without interruption."

"Why should you want a temple?" the Ballinger asked. "What are you going to do with it?"

Les raised his grubby hands above his head and clenched his teeth.

"*Do with it?* Did you hear her, Val? I thought you said that this woman had got some sense. *Do with it?* If I can discover a Mithraic temple it would be as important a find as the Mildenhall Treasure. If nobody has been there before us we *might* find gold and silver plate or untold money. And we haven't got to report everything that we find have we? There are plenty of people in the world who would pay very good money for something almost beyond price. That's why it's vital for us to get the house if we can. Once we're in, we can burn down the wood, dig up the field and search beneath the cellars if we want to. Nobody can interfere with us... See what I mean, Aunt Em? We've got to get that old man out and ourselves in just as quickly as we can. See?"

Silence followed this appeal. The Ballinger's face was expressionless until Valerie, her voice raised hysterically, said, "Why don't you *say* something, Aunt Em? Can't you *see* what a wonderful chance this is for us all. We want you to come down with us and think of some way of persuading old man Bolshaw to get out quickly. There seems no reason why he shouldn't sell but we've got to have some ready money. Les says that if you'll come in now and put up some ready money so that we can buy Amorys quickly without a lot of argument then we'll give you a share of what we find... That's right isn't it, Les dear?"

Les dear was now looking annoyed. Under his beard his face was flushed and in spite of what Valerie had told him he was beginning to think that Aunt Em was useless. Money he must have for he was sure that his instinct was right. If he could only find this temple before anybody else, he could make so much money that he would not have to work for years. He had not made up his mind yet as to whether Valerie was going to share these easy years with him, but in the meantime she was useful.

"That's what you mean isn't it, Les dear?"

"That's what you thought we might do to help this aunt of yours. Seems like a good offer to me, but she doesn't seem to be very interested. Are you, Aunt Em?"

The Ballinger peered at them shrewdly through a haze of tobacco smoke.

"There may be something in this idea of a hidden treasure. You're the expert and I don't believe you'd waste your time and money if you didn't think there was a good chance of success. I don't know what I could do to help, because I happen to be telling the truth when I say again that I've barely enough money to live on at present. I don't believe that I could raise enough to help you. All the same I'd like to be in on this - but for one thing."

Valerie stubbed out her cigarette in the saucer of her coffee cup.

"What thing? Now you know what we're after you can't back out. You're in now and you've got to stay in. Trouble with you is that you're getting old. Not so long ago you wouldn't have hesitated. What's scaring you?"

The Ballinger flushed and did not reply for a few moments. Someone switched on the radio too loudly and the lounge vibrated with jazz music. When it was muted she said:

"You're a fool, Val. I'm not particularly scared until I hear you talking and planning without thinking. Have you told Les that we've been in trouble down in Rye before? Have you?"

Les got up. "What is all this nonsense? What's she talking about, Val? There's no time to waste if we're going to get on with this job. I've a start over the others because I was able to bribe that stupid boy to keep quiet and sell me anything else that he finds. What trouble have you found in Rye?"

Val looked down at her nails and said nothing but the Ballinger began to tell him that twice before she, with Val and another accomplice, had "done business" in Rye and the country around and twice they had been thwarted largely through some children who lived in the town.



"*Children?*" he almost stuttered. "You must be mad. What does she mean, Val?"

"It's true in a way, Les dear. I didn't think it was important enough to bother you with but I'll tell you about it one day. First time we nearly put our hands on some smugglers' treasure and the second time Aunt Em had an antique shop not far from Oxney and we did some business in watches... It sounds ridiculous, but each time we got mixed up with some kids and their friends who lived at the Gay Dolphin in Rye. There was also a time when we were doing some business with pictures in London and we ran across them again. Not too good really, but even if they are still in Rye there's no reason why they should come to Oxney."

"Maybe not," the Ballinger said. "Maybe we'll never see them again, but it would be very unfortunate if they saw *us* down there. They wouldn't believe we had gone there for our health. I can't run any more risks of being caught. I've had enough. And those kids were smart. They had a dog, too."

Les, red in the face with fury, glared round the lounge which was now empty and opened his mouth to tell his two companions what he really thought of them.

But at that moment the jazz on the radio faded away to give place to news flashes.

"Roman treasure," the announcer began. "Lucky George Crump, a schoolboy on the Isle of Oxney, Kent, has just made a remarkable discovery of Roman coins in a field near his home. George says that he's very interested in Roman remains and that he knows there's lots more to be found round where he lives. Lucky George."

## 2. Amorys

On the morning of the day following the events described in the last chapter, Jonathan Warrender walked out of the Gay Dolphin in the ancient town of Rye into another adventure. The hotel, which belonged to his mother, was at the end of Trader's Street, and because there was no way out for traffic, grass grew between the cobbles of what has been called the loveliest street in the most perfect small town in England.

Down this street, as well as up Mermaid Street not far away, smugglers (called traders then) once hurried in the dark, hunted perhaps by the King's Redcoats. In many of these houses can still be found secret hiding places once used for kegs of French brandy. Now life in Trader's Street is very different. Geraniums blaze in window boxes, brass gleams behind windows, gay nasturtiums riot up door posts while sleek, contemptuous cats drowse on the pavements in the sunshine.

Jon strolled across the street and rested his elbows on a low wall which bounded it and looked towards the sea just over a mile away beyond Rye Harbour. It was a rare and perfect summer day. The blue sky was patterned with fleecy clouds and a gentle breeze from the south brought with it a faint savour of the sea and the saltings, of sheep, and of tar from the sheds in the town below where the fishermen dried and repaired their nets.

He looked to the right and saw Rye's sister town of Winchelsea - another stranded Cinque Port - drowsing on its wooded hill. Behind Winchelsea and Rye, as far as Oxney and beyond, it was possible to walk along the edge of a grassy escarpment which once was washed by the tides of the English Channel. Jon liked Winchelsea and was reminded of the first adventure that he, and his cousin Penny, had shared with their friends the Mortons. Now Penny was arriving in less than an hour, with school behind her for ever, and going to India soon to live with her parents. He had only a year before Oxford. David Morton and his young twin brother and sister were coming from London tomorrow to stay at the Dolphin for a week or two and so, in a way, this was the last summer holiday of the sort which had come to mean so much to them all.

Jon turned and leaned against the sun-warmed wall and looked up Trader's Street. An American couple from the hotel came out and smiled at him, and the first of the day-visitors to discover the street aimed their cine cameras at the coloured sign of the wicked old dolphin over the porch.

Jon was nearly six feet tall and much tougher than he looked. No barber had been able to make more than a temporary improvement to his fair, tousled head which invariably looked like a haystack after a hurricane, as Penny had once told him. He was intelligent, and like most really clever people did not have much to say. He was not as keen on games as his friend David, was a bad letter writer and until lately had not shown much interest in girls.

Until lately. He was not sure how lately, but certainly during this long summer term when there had been so much to think about, so much work to do and yet so many responsibilities at school, he had found himself thinking of Penny and missing her disturbingly often. For the first time in his life he had realized that they were both growing up and that this gay little red-head was intruding into his orderly life. She used to write to him several times a term, sending her letters through his mother because, as she explained, her narrow-minded school had old-fashioned ideas about senior girls writing to senior boys even though they were cousins. He hardly ever replied, and in her warm-hearted way Penny always forgave him when they met at the Dolphin in the holidays. Until lately he had thought of her as a sort of kid-sister, although he had always been very fond of her and taken little more notice of her tantrums than of her impetuous affection. She had written to him three times this term, but none of those letters had had much of the schoolgirl about them. They had been friendly and often with comments about mutual friends. Sometimes they had made him laugh because she had a fine sense of fun and a quick wit, but there had not been as much affectionate chatter about what they were going to do together in the holidays or how much she was going to miss the Dolphin and Mrs. Warrender who was a second mother to her. And no suggestion that she was going to miss him either! As he had broken up a week before, he had written as soon as he got home and suggested that Penny should catch a really early train so that she would be in Rye just before noon and that he would meet her at the station.

He put a hand in the pocket of his shabby slacks and brought out a crumpled postcard which had arrived two days ago. It had only four words on it - "Shall do. Love. Penny."

Jon had passed his driving test at the beginning of the week and so had wanted to borrow his mother's car and take Penny out for the day. Mrs. Warrender did not drive and the old car was used mostly by Vasson the hotel porter. Unfortunately it had broken down this morning and now he had to think of something else to do. Perhaps he had better ask Penny what she would like? He smiled wryly as he considered that this would be a change. He usually told his cousin what he expected of her and she usually agreed.

His mother came out of the hotel and crossed the cobbles. She was small and neat with hair the colour of his own but showing signs of greying. There was a great bond between them. Jon was well aware of how lucky he was, but he had never been able to express to her his admiration for her courage in facing life again after his father's death, nor for her sympathy and understanding of his difficulties and hopes.

The top of her head reached only to his shoulder and he felt a sudden rush of affection for her as she smiled up at him.

"Sorry about the car, Jon. They've just phoned from the garage and it won't be ready until this evening. I've got another idea for you and Penny today but I'll save it until she's here. I've asked the kitchen for packed lunches for you both and Vasson is checking over Penny's bike - something you forgot to do. It's a good idea for you both to go out together today as the Mortons arrive tomorrow... You'd better get down to the station now. Leave her luggage if it's too heavy and Fred will pick it up this evening when he's fetched the car. Or would you rather have a taxi? It's the last time Penny will come home to Rye."

"I know, Mother. Thanks all the same for the offer of the taxi but I'm sure she'd rather walk up. She always does. Why can't you tell me your plan before she comes? I may not think it suitable."

She laughed. "I don't want her to think I'm making plans for her behind her back. Don't waste time in the town. I'm looking forward to seeing her."

Jon strolled up Trader's Street in the sun, round the churchyard and under the tower where the bell-boys struck the quarters, and then down through the town to the station. He was early of course. There was ten minutes before the train from Ashford was due, so he sat on a luggage truck on the platform and tried not to feel excited.

Would she look the same, he wondered? It was ridiculous but he could not remember *exactly* how she had looked when he had said "Goodbye" to her at the end of last term. He knew that she was short and slim, with naturally curly red hair which was her special pride. Grey eyes, freckled skin, slightly tip-tilted nose and a wide mouth, but exactly how she had looked and what she was wearing when he had left her at the Dolphin twelve weeks ago escaped him.

"*Shall do. Love. Penny.*" What was she thinking now as the little diesel train came chugging over the Marsh? That this was the last time she would make this journey and that in a few weeks she would leave Rye and the Dolphin and his mother - and him? He got up and lounged down the platform. It was absurd, of course, but now, for the first time, he suddenly realized that after the next few weeks he might not see her for years. She would be in India where her father was an engineer working for the Government and where she would probably have a very gay life. He would not be down from Oxford for another four years, and by that time Penny would be nearly twenty and probably engaged or married to somebody he had never seen. The very possibility of such an occurrence seemed to him to be so disgraceful that he walked down the slope at the end of the platform without noticing what he was doing. As he turned he heard the signal of a bell in the signal box and the level crossing gates swung across the road.

Would she as usual be waving frantically from the window? He could hear the throb of the approaching train now but it was not as loud as the thudding of his heart. He stood by the luggage truck as the porter he had known for years strolled up the platform and raised a hand in salutation. The train came round the curve and stopped. She was not leaning from a window. A fat woman with a shopping basket and a couple of hikers with packs on

their backs got out. Penny had not come. She had messed it up. Forgotten to change at Ashford. Got into conversation with some idiot somewhere and missed the train. She was, and always had been, completely irresponsible. Selfish too, by upsetting people. The guard with his green flag in his hand was still gossiping to the porter, when a door of the coach next to the driver's cabin opened and an elderly gentleman got out. He was holding an old suitcase secured with rope. As soon as he had put this on the platform somebody inside the compartment passed him another case, and then the old chap handed out Penny as if she was a princess. As Jon ran forward the guard blew his whistle petulantly, the man got back into the train, leaned forward from the window and waved to Penny. She waved back and was still waving when Jon came up. He was so relieved to see her that he said the first thing that came into his mind.

"Who on earth is that? Have you known him long?"

She turned and regarded him gravely. Then she flushed and said quietly:

"Believe it or not but his name is George Jonkins and I've only known him since Ashford. He's been visiting a married daughter somewhere in Kent. He lives at Hastings where he has a chemist's shop and he was very charming... And what is more he was very polite... How are you, Jon?"

She was wearing her school suit of grey flannel and a bright blue blouse. In one hand she carried her school straw hat and in the other a very old and almost bald teddy bear. As he looked down at her feeling rightly snubbed he saw, to his dismay, that there were tears in her eyes.

"I'm sorry, Penny. That was rude of me. I was worried because you didn't seem to be on the train. You're generally looking from the window. Forgive me?"

She stepped back and looked up the line at the disappearing train.

"Oh yes Jon, I forgive you - and not for the first time for something like that. Is your darling mother here?"

"No. She's waiting for you at home. Got a plan for us today and wouldn't tell me... I'm very pleased to see you and you're looking fine."

She turned to him impetuously and laughed.

"Oh, Jon! You're so infuriating. All the time in the train when that dear old bore was rambling on I was wondering what we should say to each other when we met and whether you'd think I'd changed, and then we start off with a silly little squabble. Your fault of course. Do *you* think I've changed?" and she stood before him with her hands behind her back and looked up at him.

"Yes, you have. You don't look right in those ridiculous clothes. You've grown up."

She laughed happily and raised her cheek to be kissed.

"You're impossible, but you're quite nice and this time you've said the right thing. These clothes *are* a ghastly sort of fancy dress and I *have* grown up... Let's say a short farewell to this horror." And she spun her straw hat with a flick of the wrist on to a pile of coal in the adjoining goods yard.

"That's that! I'd have left it in the train but for old Jonkins. Is Fred here with the car? I don't think that even great strong Jonathan can carry these cases up to the Dolphin... Oh good. Then we can leave them here and walk up together."

They said "Hello" to the porter and Penny told him that she had bequeathed her school hat to British Rail.

"Somebody told me that our lovely station has been given the kiss of death," she went on. "If they close it you can bury my hat with it. Come on, Jon. Take me home," and they went in companionable silence out into the crowds of shoppers and tourists in the High Street.

As they were walking up Lion Street towards the church she took his hand.

"Did you hear what I said in the station, Jon? I asked you to take me home and I meant the Dolphin. It's all very well for me to say that I'm grown up, but I don't feel it when I realize that Rye isn't going to be my home any more."

"You'll be going to another home. Your own home," he said huskily. "You'll all come to England sometimes and I expect we'll be here."

"Why should you?" she said quietly. "You're not going to spend all your life with your mother I hope," and then with a sudden change of mood, "Oh, Jon. Why are we being so miserable? I'm sorry if it's my fault. Let's make the best of the time we've got. I've really left school and life begins for me today. Now tell me your news because you're the worst boy friend a girl ever had. You never write to me. What are we going to do today? Your mother told me that the Mortons are coming tomorrow."

"So they are. I'd have liked more of you on my own."

"Jon darling," she laughed. "You're rushing me. What are we going to do? Is the plan yours or your mother's?"

He told her then that he had passed his driving test but could not have the car today, although there was no reason why they should not use it when David and the twins were here.

"Mother is giving us a packed lunch," he went on. "I thought that as soon as you've changed we could go out on our bikes and explore the Marsh. Might take our swimming things and see if we can find a bare bit of beach somewhere. I hope you're in good form for cycling?"

"There is no form of locomotion that I detest more," she said. "It's a barbaric form of torture. The wind is always against little Penny when she's cycling and changes when she turns round to come home. I'm not really strong enough to be a cyclist, Jon. I'll come with you today because it's the beginning of my new life, but please don't ask me to cycle with you again. Perhaps your mother has a better idea?"



Before he could answer they turned into Trader's Street and saw Mrs. Warrender coming towards them. Penny ran ahead to meet her and that was the last Jon saw of either of them for three quarters of an hour.

He spent the waiting time with Fred in the yard at the side of the Dolphin and then sitting on the wall in the sunshine, and he was still there when Penny came out to him. At first he was dumb as she stood before him, pink and a little shy, with her hands characteristically behind her back. She was wearing a sleeveless dress of green linen with a scarlet belt and scarlet sandals. He had seen this dress before but on the last occasion it had been worn by a schoolgirl. Now it was gracing an elegant young woman.

"Please don't stare, Jon. Will I do? If we're going cycling I s'pose I should have worn my jeans but I felt like this dress. You said once that you liked it. Your mother is waiting for us. I tried to make her tell me her idea but she wouldn't be wheedled. Said you must be there too. She spoils you, Jon. Come along. I'm in the mood for being spoiled too."

They went up to Mrs. Warrender's private room and found her cutting a classified advertisement out of the local paper.

"Here you are," she smiled. "Listen to this.

*BOARD RESIDENCE available in old farmhouse. Delightful situation in Isle of Oxney overlooking Romney Marsh. Three bedrooms available. No telephone. Write for details or call and inspect. Bolshaw, Amorys, Stone-in-Oxney.*

My idea is that you both go over there now and see what this place is like. You know that David and the twins arrive tomorrow and I've got two rooms for them next door, but I *could* use those rooms right away as we're full up here. If you like this Mrs. Bolshaw - and I suppose it's more important that she likes you all - you might have much more fun over there than you would here. If she's only got three bedrooms and they're still vacant you'd fill the house. She might refuse to take you when you disclose that you've got twins in the party, but you could at least go and see the place. Not everybody would want to go to Oxney, but I've been there and it's rather fascinating - like a tiny continent raised above the levels which are

separated from it by the Military Canal. What do you think of the idea, Jon?"

"All right, Mother, but we should have to make it right with the Mortons too. They think they're coming here. They love the Dolphin - but I believe there's something else you haven't told us and that you're waiting to do that until we've seen the place... Come clean."

"There is something else," she admitted. "They've just discovered some Roman treasure in Oxney. A boy who found something valuable was interviewed on television last night. He said it was his second find. I remember thinking that he was a rather nasty boy, but it's true that there should be plenty of Roman coins and spoons and all sorts of relics to be found in Oxney and indeed in many of the western parts of the Marsh. I thought how you've all been reasonably successful in the past in finding hidden treasure and that Oxney might interest you. That's all I was hiding. Your lunches are ready in the hall. Have a good day."

Five minutes later they were on their way with Penny grumbling that the wind, which up till then had been a gentle zephyr from the south, had now veered to the east and was impeding her progress. There was not much traffic on their road which ran inland almost under the line of the old cliffs so they were able to ride abreast. Away to the south on their right stretched the levels which here are called Walland Marsh. Wherever they looked were sheep and dykes, well described as "a gigantic chessboard of water courses" and which are a paradise for herons. Above the pastures hundreds of restless peewits wheeled in tumbling flight and Jon, remembering that the Lone Piners' secret signal to each other was the peewit's plaintive cry, whistled in reply. Soon they saw ahead the wooded bluff which was the southern tip of Oxney, while on their right, parallel to the road and behind a screen of lime trees, was the Military Canal dug to impede Napoleon's armies.

"I can't stand this torture much longer," Penny wailed. "Somebody has done something horrible to this bike while I've been away. It's even worse than I thought."

"Not much farther, Penny. I thought we'd picnic under the trees on the canal bank, just by the road up to Oxney. We might get a swim first if you feel like it."

"In the canal?" Penny gasped. "You're crazy... And another thing, Jon. Why couldn't you hire a car to take me out on our first day. What's the use of passing your driving test and then making me ride a bike. I may as well tell you now that I intend to walk back - unless, of course, you can dig up a Roman chariot and drive me home with this foul bike tied on the back."

For a moment he wondered if it would be unwise to laugh and then saw that she was laughing at him.

"O.K.," he said. "Let's eat now. Get off carefully in case you collapse and we'll totter over there under the trees."

They left their bikes by the roadside, climbed the bank of the canal and found a place where they could look across the wind-ruffled water towards the sea eight miles away to the south. They were suddenly alone and could not even see the cars roaring past below them. The gentle wind was rustling the leaves of the lime trees and every now and then a leaf would flutter down to float like a tiny sailing-boat on the surface of the canal.

Jon heaved the knapsack off his back and flopped down on the grass. He was very hot.

"Sure you don't want a swim, Penny? I never have bathed in the canal but I suppose it's all right. Not too many weeds, I mean," and he stretched himself out in the shade.

She was on the bank looking down at the water and spoke to him over her shoulder.

"My late house-mistress, whom I never want to see again because she so often thought she was being funny when she wasn't, once told me... What was I going to tell you, Jon?"

"I've no idea," he murmured with his eyes closed. "No idea. Come over here and fan me."

"I will not. I've remembered. This woman said that in Victorian days it was indelicate for a young lady ever to mention that she was made uncomfortable by the heat. Victorian maidens were told that horses sweated, gentlemen perspired, but young ladies glowed... Jon, I'm going to tell you something. I'm glowing like anything and I *am* going to bathe. Kindly disturb yourself and throw me my towel and swimsuit which are in the knapsack, and I'll go into yonder glade which looks like a blackberry bush and make ready. You can bathe too if you like."

Jon was not a very good swimmer. Perhaps it was because he could not see much without his glasses that he had not been as keen as most of his friends on bathing, but of course if Penny was going in so was he.

She was in the water first. He had just struggled out of his shirt when he saw a flash of green on the canal bank and heard a splash and a squeal. He was about to follow her when he realized that he was still wearing his specs, so he ran back and put them in his shoe for safety and then jumped in. The water was colder and deeper than he expected and as his head went under he felt soft mud and weeds clinging round his legs. He surfaced and looked round for Penny who had gone into the water about twenty yards farther up.

"Here I am, you idiot," she called, and then he saw the red blur of her head and the white of her arms and shoulders. With his rather clumsy breast-stroke he began to swim towards her, and at that moment she gave a sharp cry of pain and to his horror began to flounder and splash in the water.

"Quickly, Jon," she gasped. "Something bit my ankle and now the weeds are dragging at me."

There probably never was a more clumsy effort at rescue than Jon's, but somehow he dragged her through the mud and the reeds to the bank. The truth was that although Penny was not badly hurt she was, for a few moments, panicky. As she struggled to free herself from the clinging weeds her head went twice under water, and what she described as a bite was a nasty gash from a broken bottle. For a moment or two they leaned against

the bank, half in and half out of the water. Jon was gasping for breath and holding Penny with an arm round her shoulders. She was trembling but after a few moments lifted her head and gave him a shaky smile.

"All right now, Jon. I'll be O.K. Sorry to have made such a fool of myself. Please help me up and I'll get my clothes on."

He heaved himself up the bank and then took her hands and pulled her up as gently as he could. She was very pale and near to tears; blood was oozing from a jagged cut above her ankle.

"Little idiot," Jon said shakily. "Why didn't you wait for me before jumping in. You'd better not move from here until we've bound up that cut. Where's your towel?"

"On the bank somewhere near here, Jon dear... I'm sorry but I feel rather sick."

"Better if you are," he said unsympathetically. "Wait there until I come back."

He ran back to the tree where he had left his clothes and thankfully put on his specs, collected everything else and found her towel and sandals only a few yards from where they were sitting.

"Wrap yourself in your towel and get as dry as you can," he said. "I bet Mother has given us a flask of coffee and a hot drink is what we both need. Been sick?"

She shook her head and said in a very small voice, "Better now, I think. I'd love some coffee. Are you all right Jon?"

"Wonderful. Just super," he said grimly as he unscrewed the top of the flask. "No more canal bathing for me though, and I'd be glad if you wouldn't frighten me again like that. Now let's see your foot. Drink your coffee and look the other way if you like."

"I should think it hurts like hell, but it looks reasonably clean," he said. "By an act of God I've got a clean handkerchief and I'll sacrifice the tail of my shirt to bind it up. Are you warmer now?"

He was kneeling at her feet as he spoke and when he looked up she smiled at him over the rim of the mug.

"I'm scalding my mouth," she whispered. "But it's worth it. Better now, thank you, Jon, and the cut doesn't hurt much. I like being spoiled like this and I never was any good at First Aid. I bet my hair looks awful."

"You're right, it does," he said more cheerfully. "Put your mug down for a sec and hold this folded handkerchief over the ghastly wound while I destroy a good shirt. I suppose I shall have to tell my mum that the laundry did it. I shall probably get pneumonia wearing only half a shirt."

Penny did as she was told and he made a good job of the bandaging and then had some coffee himself. She thanked him and they both went off to dress before settling down to their picnic under the lime tree.

Penny looked better but was unusually silent, and after a little Jon suggested that she might like to go back to Rye without trying to find Amorys.

"If it hurts you to cycle I expect we could hitch a lift, and I could collect the bikes tonight when we've got the car back."

"Of course we're going to find Amorys. I'm not as feeble as that and anyway your shirt is acting like a talisman. I'm sure my foot has stopped bleeding and it hardly hurts. No, Jon. Let's forget about the canal episode. It's something I want to forget anyway - except the way you helped me. I'd have been in a mess if you hadn't been there. Pass me a banana and let's talk about Romans. We've not said a word yet about Roman treasure. Was your mother teasing us about something being found yesterday, and do you really think there would be the slightest chance of finding anything? You're not particularly keen on Roman antiquities and all that are you? And what will the Mortons think? Still, I suppose we needn't worry too much about Romans if we really like Amorys. All the same I'm not quite sure exactly what we're going to *do* on Oxney. I'm against canal bathing and I'm against

cycling so I s'pose I shall have to concentrate on treasure hunting. Seems as if our activities are going to be restricted, Jonathan... Tell me about the Romans and the Marsh. I'll try not to doze off but I think it's getting thundery. I'm not awfully good with thunder."

Jon lay back on the grass with his hands behind his head and looked up at the sky through the leaves of the lime tree. Although it was still hot the sun had gone in and the wind had dropped. He glanced at Penny leaning against the trunk of the tree and had the sense not to remark that she was pale.

"Well, Jon?" she smiled. "I know that science is your thing but what do you know about the Romans?"

"Not much except that they must have landed all along this coast after old Julius Caesar in 55 B.C., which I suppose is a date that even you know. Somebody told me that the part of the Marsh between here and Rye was covered at high tide years after the eastern part was reclaimed. The Romans are supposed to have started building what is now Dymchurch Wall and you remember we've been there. All the little museums round here have got plenty of Roman odds and ends. I'm not crazy about them, but it makes sense that they might well have landed almost where we are now and marched up to the higher land of Oxney on their way into Kent. I don't see how we could find any Roman treasure and I don't want to spend the time digging any more than you want to go cycling, but if we like Amorys and stay there we might make some enquiries. Looking for Roman coins could keep the twins quiet. Do you feel like walking up the hill now and taking a look at Oxney? I'll push your bike and if we can't find Amorys easily we'll go home and get your ankle properly cleaned up. How does it feel now? Can you walk on it?"

She could, and as it was not too painful they decided to look for Amorys for an hour and no more. Jon helped her down the bank to the road and she managed to cycle about a quarter of a mile to the lane which ran sharply up the blunt "nose" of Oxney. It was easy to imagine the waves beating against the foot of this bluff and armoured Roman soldiers jumping from their galleys into the foaming water, scrunching through the shingle and then perhaps walking up this very track.

"I'm glowing again," Penny gasped when they reached the top of the hill, "and you, I notice, are perspiring. Thank you for pushing my bike, but I hope we haven't got to cycle long distances inland in search of natives. This place is as deserted as a desert island."

They got on their bikes again and a few minutes later found a farm gate across a rough track on the left of the road marked "Amorys" in faded letters. To the gate post was pinned a square of white cardboard on which was inscribed - Board Residence.

"I have received the answer I wanted to a fervent prayer," Penny said as she dismounted carefully. "This doesn't look very inviting but we haven't had to travel far to find it. I can't see the house but let's go and look for it. Mrs. Bolshaw is probably a witch. Why should anyone want to stay here?"

Jon opened the gate and left the bicycles leaning against a tree. The little lane bordered with pine trees curved away downhill to the left, and when they turned the corner they saw the old farmhouse about fifty yards away. Although sullen thunder clouds now covered the sky the walls and roof of the old house glowed as if with stored sunshine. It was very old and very attractive and Penny said, "I like this place. I don't suppose the woman is a witch, and I daresay the back is more exciting than the front because from the windows, or the garden if there is one, we should be high enough to look right across the Marsh to the sea and Dungeness. Let's explore."

In front of the house was a patch of grass which once might have been a well-kept lawn divided by a path of old flagstones. The track led round the side of the house to some outbuildings. As they stepped on to the path a man came out of the open front door and smiled at them. He was short and slight and wearing khaki slacks (very much tidier than Jon's), a blue shirt and a white-spotted blue choker. His neatly parted hair was white and so was his smart little moustache. His face was tanned but lined and his eyes very blue.

"Good afternoon, sir," Jon said. "We've come from Rye where my mother keeps the Dolphin. We saw your advertisement and wondered whether Mrs. Bolshaw has got room for us - this is my cousin Penelope Warrender - and three friends. Altogether we're five including boy and girl twins aged ten."



"God bless my soul!" the little man said, and fixed an eyeglass in his eye. "Five of you, including twins? What a family! Should explain though. There isn't a Mrs. Bolshaw. Dear wife died five weeks ago. I'm Major Bolshaw. Retired of course. Now live here alone. Lovely old house going to waste. Three bedrooms to spare though. Like to see them? What's the matter with the girl's foot?"

Penny told him.

"Very foolish. Shouldn't bathe in the canal. Full of barbed wire from the war and booby traps shouldn't be surprised. Up to the bathroom with you. Wash the cut properly. First Aid box with disinfectant and bandages on the shelf. Come on. Show you the way then come down to kitchen where I'll be talking to this chap. You'd like a cup of tea no doubt. So would I. Be ready for you. Come along."

The tiled hall led right through the house to another open door through which they could see another garden. On the right of the hall was an uncarpeted staircase and up this the little man led Penny, still murmuring her thanks.

"Kitchen at end of corridor on right," the Major called over his shoulder. "Wait for me there, boy."

Feeling slightly dazed Jon did as he was told. The kitchen was large but sparsely furnished, and he at once had the impression that there was not much money to spare in this house, and how one elderly man could hope to look after one guest let alone five young people was a mystery. Perhaps he had some daily help, but he had said that he lived here alone, so why on earth was he advertising "Board Residence"? Jon hoped that they were not wasting their time but he was thankful for the old chap's kindness to Penny.

In a very few minutes he came down looking rather like a smart little gnome, and started rummaging in a dresser for cups and saucers.

"Charming girl. Charming. Shouldn't go swimming in the canal though. Dangerous. What's your name? Jonathan, you say? Well, Jonathan, don't really think I could feed five of you. Hoped I might get one couple. Could

manage that. Want an interest here and would welcome some youngsters. Do me good. Get me out of myself. Dear wife loved young people. Never had any of our own."

Jon was beginning to feel out of his depth. The Major was certainly eccentric and it was difficult to know how to answer him and he wished Penny would come. But Penny was taking her time and Jon guessed - correctly as it happened - that she was trying to do something to her hair.

So he fidgeted about while the Major made the tea and was thankful when he said, "Go and find that girl. Give her a call from the top of the stairs. Tea will be better for her than a lot of tittivating."

Jon hurried into the hall in time to meet Penny at the bottom of the stairs. Her hair looked very nice again. She also looked much better and the cut on her foot was now covered with a big strip of adhesive plaster. Jon whispered, "He's made some tea. What do you think? Do you like the place? He's crackers and he's very decent, but he couldn't possibly look after all of us."

"I like the house, Jon. We could have fun here and I've got an idea how to make it work. He's a wonderful old boy but he's very unhappy and lonely - and I think he's poor too. Would you mind coming if he agrees to my idea?"

"If you want to. It's a bit hard on the Mortons but I don't think we've ever been bored anywhere, and if we tell them it's O.K. they'll come. We might be able to get to the sea every day. Come on, he's waiting for us."

She was holding his hand when they walked into the kitchen, but when the old man smiled at them she dropped him a little curtsey - an action which surprised Jon very much!

"Thank you sir," she said. "That was kind of you. My wound is clean and so, I hope, is my face - and I've been longing for tea."

As they sat round the table he talked to them as if he had known them for months instead of half an hour. He told them simply how he missed his wife

and how much they had both loved this house and that he had determined never to sell it.

"Happiest years of my life here. Can still be happy in different ways. Sometimes feel she's still here. Promised to stay here always if I can, but must have some company sometimes. Like you all to come for a week. Try it out. Might not work because I can't feed five of you."

Penny put her elbows on the table and her chin on her folded hands.

"We'd like to come very much, Major. Jon and I love this house already and we hope that we can make a bargain with you. You want a rest from housekeeping, and as I've just left school for good I could do with some practice. You let us the bedrooms - we shall want two doubles and a single - and we'll supply our food and cook for you as well. You'll realize that we may want to take packed lunches out sometimes, but you'll share our breakfast and our supper. We've warned you that, if you agree, we shall bring ten-year-old twins who may be troublesome and a Scottie dog who won't be if he likes you. And I'm sure he will. What do you think, sir? Will you put up with us?"

To their dismay the old man's eyes filled with tears.

"Delighted," he said huskily. "Like your company. Very kind thought. Suppose it's crazy of me to think I could look after guests on my own. Looking forward to having you all. Come tomorrow with twins and dog. Show you the garden now. All gone to rack and ruin but there's a coppice and a small quarry and a bit of a field running down to the road. Might like to camp out there. Come and see."

He led them out of the back door, and Penny's guess that there would be a wonderful prospect was right. The land sloped downhill from the house into an overgrown orchard below which was a copse and they were high enough to see over the tops of the trees right across the Marsh. Away to their left against a murky horizon they could just see the old and new lighthouses at Dungeness, although the atmosphere was thick and heavy with thunder.

They had gone down the hill only about fifty yards when they were halted by a shout behind them.

"Hi, there! Good afternoon. Couldn't make anyone hear so I walked straight through. Be glad to have a word with you, sir."

They turned round to see an untidy-looking young man with a straggly red beard and horn-rimmed spectacles. In spite of the heat he was wearing a thick black sweater and dark trousers.

The Major looked at the stranger with distaste. "I'm sorry. Didn't hear your ring. What can I do for you? Name is Bolshaw. Major."

The young man did not return the courtesy by giving his own name.

"Saw the notice on your gate, Bolshaw. You don't remember me but I've called here before. I like this house. My fiancée is outside in the car and she's taken a fancy to this part of the country just as I have. We'll take two of your rooms for a week with full board, and if you can offer a private sitting room I'll take that. Like to move in now, as a matter of fact."

Neither Jon nor Penny were deliberately eavesdropping, but as the two men were only about ten yards away it was impossible not to overhear what was being said.

"I'm sorry, sir," the Major replied stiffly. "I have no accommodation to offer. I have just let *all* my rooms."

The stranger flushed and looked meaningly at the Warrenders.

"Now look here, Major. I'd like to speak to you privately. My girl wants to come here. You know what women are when they get an idea in their heads. I want to come in now and I know I can make it worth your while. I might even make you a good offer for the house."

The Major looked horrified while Jon, feeling rather uncomfortable stepped forward.

"Would you prefer not to make up your mind about us until tomorrow, sir?" he suggested. "Perhaps you'd like time to consider what this----"

"Nonsense, my boy. Most considerate but of course I shan't change my mind. Now sir. Permit me to show you out. I have no rooms to let and this house is not for sale and never will be," and then over his shoulder, "Wait for me, if you please."

So they waited while the angry Major, rather like a little bantam cock, strutted ahead of the young man who continued to argue and wave his hands in the air.

Penny looked at Jon and giggled.

"Nasty man. Did you see his pointed shoes? He *was* keen to come here, wasn't he?"

"Very odd," Jon said. "And very keen. I wonder why?"

"Something to do with Roman treasure, I expect. Let's ask the Major when he comes back if he knows anything about what was found here a day or two ago. This place has got an odd feeling about it, Jon. I want to stay here. I've got a hunch about it now and you were an ass to give the old dear a chance to get out of our bargain. He's so nice and I'm sure we can give him a better time than that sandy-whiskered bully could."

### 3. The Dream

Do you think we are making fools of ourselves?" Jon said as soon, as the Major and his unpleasant visitor disappeared into the house. "You know, Penny, this place might perhaps be a good centre for us for a week, but there are going to be lots of chores looking after ourselves and the old boy. Not much of a holiday, really."

Penny, who was gazing abstractly at the thunder clouds piling up over the Marsh, turned to him impetuously.

"I know, Jon. I know. Be patient with me. I've got an odd feeling about this place and I really think we could help this sad old man by staying here. Of course if the Mortons don't like the idea, we'll have to give it up."

"Were you serious just now when you said you thought that nasty customer wanted Amorys because of something to do with Roman treasure?"

"Not really, but you never know. He was keen to get in here, wasn't he? You would have thought he would have tried a little charm and I can't help wondering what sort of a woman it is who loves him. There goes his car now. When the Major comes back we'll ask him more about this Roman business... I've got a headache, Jon. There's going to be a terrible storm. Let's wait here until it's over."

Major Bolshaw was mopping his forehead as he came out into the garden. He was ruffled and angry.

"Apologise for interruption. Impertinent young man. Ridiculous suggestion. Now I'll show you rest of the place. Hope you'll all come tomorrow," and he led them down a track through the thick undergrowth of the orchard in which some hens were happily scratching. Most of the old apple trees were loaded with unripe fruit and it was obvious that they had been untended for years.

The spinney which they had first seen from the back of the house was on level ground and much denser than they had expected.

"Curious place this," the Major said. "Must be very old. Dear wife used to say it was haunted. No time for that sort of thing myself, but you may like to explore it. Might see a ghost - who knows? Some people more sensitive than others. Mind the brambles, young lady. Don't want any more casualties."

There most certainly was an unusual atmosphere about the little wood. It was so overgrown and the trees so close together that for a few moments they found it difficult to see properly. And it was quiet. No bird sang. No pigeon fluttered up through the thick branches and no jay screamed a warning at the sound of their voices. There was not a breath of wind to stir the treetops, and only the mutter of thunder overhead and the scuffle of their footsteps in the dry undergrowth broke the silence.

Penny shivered and felt for Jon's hand. She did not like this wood and it was a relief when the Major, crashing through the clinging brambles a yard or so ahead began to talk again.

"Had no time to look after the place when my wife was ill. Must get down to it. Soon clear this path with a sickle. Worth the effort to see the view when we get through. Nearly there now."

It was worth it. Suddenly it became clearer and they saw a baby rabbit scutter across the track. The trees thinned out, the grass was soft under their feet, and then they were out on a little clearing about twelve paces square bounded by the wood on each side, and by a fringe of gorse bushes. The yellow bloom was along the edge of a drop into what might have been an old quarry.

"Pleasant spot this," the Major said. "Thought you'd like it. My wife enjoyed picnics. Can't think why but she did. Used to bring our tea down here sometimes. Away from everything and get a view that can't be matched in England on a clear day. Look at it now under the thunder clouds. Horizon looks like a steel ruler. Remarkable. What d'you think of it? Those young twins of yours could camp here, what?"

Jon looked at him admiringly as they walked over to a gap between the gorse bushes and looked down.

"So they could, sir. Just what they'd like. It's a wonderful hide-out - and a lookout too. What's this down here? A quarry or where part of the old cliff once collapsed?"

The drop was not sheer and only about eight feet deep with piles of stones and rubble showing between the nettles and brambles. Beyond this wilderness was a rough field of pasture with only a wire fence dividing it from the road and the canal beyond it.

"I'm sure I remember seeing the yellow gorse from the road," Penny said as she sat on the grass, and then went on, "It's too hot and stuffy to move until the storm breaks, so why don't you stay and talk to us for a while, Major. There's something particular we want to ask you about."

"Tell you anything I can my dear, but should really be working. So much to do in the garden. Ought to clear the track through the wood. Orchard wants tidying. Plenty to do in the house. No time to waste."

"Yes there is," Penny said, patting the grass beside her. "Some time is made to be wasted. Persuade him, Jon. We want to ask him about Roman treasures, don't we?"

The old man gave them one of his rare smiles and then sat down beside them complaining that he was getting stiff in the joints.

"Roman treasure, Penelope? What can I tell you? There's a Roman stone altar up in the church you can go and see for yourselves. I'm not interested. Old friend in London great expert though. Says the altar was for the worship of Mithras."

Jon told him that they had heard about discoveries in Oxney, and that only yesterday it was reported that a boy had found some coins or a silver spoon in one of the fields. "I believe it was in the papers and my mother said he was on television."



The Major seemed mildly surprised.

"Is that so? Don't have a daily paper or television. Listen to the radio sometimes. Lad must have been young George Crump from the Smuggler's Rest. Don't care for the boy. Always snooping about. Saw him in the field down there the other day. Found some Roman coins at Easter I believe. Don't care for him."

This was all very well, but Jon was persistent. If the Major had lived in Oxney for so long surely he would know if there had ever been any spectacular finds, and like Penny he was beginning to think that there was something suspicious about the visit of the sandy-whiskered young man just now. But on being pressed the Major became uneasy and got up to go.

"Can't tell you any more. All this coast was used by the Romans. Invaders always tempted by easy beaches and flat land. Hitler would have tried about here, and a very hot time he would have had over the old Marsh. If you spent months scratching about over Oxney you'd find Roman coins and bits of pottery and the like. Some people crazy on digging. No doubt that wretched boy George has got pockets full of Roman coins. Probably drops 'em and then says he's found 'em. Don't like the boy... You two stay here as long as you like. Come and find me in the house when you're ready," and he marched off into the wood.

"For some reason unknown the Major doesn't want to talk to us about Romans," Jon said. "We also know that he doesn't care for George Crump although he credits him with initiative. He also wants us to come here and I must say I'm tempted. We *could* make a camp here only I don't suppose the Mortons have brought sleeping bags. How are you feeling, Penny? Have I got to carry you home presently?"

Before she could answer there was a distant rumble of thunder and a flash of lightning over the sea. Above the hard line of the horizon the sky was yellow, and away to the south-east the new lighthouse at Dungeness stood up sharply like a tiny white pencil.

Penny lay on the grass and closed her eyes. "My foot doesn't hurt now but my head aches. It's so hot and stuffy and I'm sleepy. When the storm breaks

my head will be better but you must wake me if we're going to get drenched. Don't go away, Jon..."

She smiled at him, pillowed her head on her arm and closed her eyes. For a long time she was conscious of no sound but the steady beating of her own heart. Then the silence was broken by the sudden hoarse cry of a bird and the flapping of wings, and she was aware that Jon must have shifted his position to watch it. Two cars then passed on the road below them and but for another growl of thunder the silence surged back. For a moment or two she remembered the strange feeling that she was being watched by invisible eyes as they forced their way through the wood - a feeling that she had not even confessed to Jon - and then blissfully she sank into sleep.

Presently she was aware of a rhythmic and familiar soothing sound - the beating of waves and the hiss of receding water on a shingle beach. She opened her eyes to evening sunlight glinting on the armour of soldiers on the deck of a wooden ship moored against a rough stone quay. She heard words of command in a strange language, and knew that she was watching the landing of Roman soldiers on the coast - or more likely on the beach of a small island off Britain, although there was nothing familiar about the coastline. Then, above the sounds of orderly bustle on the decks of the trireme she heard the sounds of oars thudding into the water and round a headland came another galley.

At this stage of her dream Penny felt detached from what she was seeing. She felt neither surprise, excitement nor fear. What was happening before her eyes was more real than the television or cinema screen but she was not yet a part of what was happening. That came later. With the fear.

The second galley moored behind the first as the sun began to sink. For a few moments the restless water seemed to be splashed with blood and then the soldiers were marching towards her - lean, brown-faced, tough legionaries with rounded helmets, bronze breastplates, armoured kilts and leg guards. They carried spears on their shoulders and great, gleaming curved shields on their left arms. These were the soldiers of one of the greatest armies of the greatest empires the world has ever known and where they marched they conquered, and as they marched towards Penny now they sang. At their head was a proud Centurion in glowing bronze armour,

with a great bronze helmet with a bronze clasp under his chin. And on the top of the helmet was a plume of horse-hair dyed red which was flicking in the wind blowing fresh from the sea. Penny noticed how proudly he held his head and thought to herself that these indeed were men!

She looked back to the sea and was surprised to see a dozen or so youths in white robes who must have disembarked from the second galley and were now moving towards the beach. Then the picture faded.

She was in a grove of trees on a gentle hillside and now could see the setting sun. She could hear the sound of singing and music, and then down the hill came another procession of men led by a youth clad in gorgeous robes. He was also wearing a curious conical peaked cap and carrying a two-edged sword, and Penny knew that they were going down to meet the soldiers and those men she had seen in white togas disembarking from the second ship. Then, as the sound of the flutes and cymbals died away, this picture faded too.

She was alone now. Crouching in the cold on a stone-flagged floor. She was shivering and afraid, and when she found the courage to look up she saw, through what seemed to be an arch, the flicker of a small fire. She tried to move and could not, and knew that if this were indeed a dream it would soon become a nightmare.

As her eyes became accustomed to the gloom she realized that she was at one end of a stone chamber and looking up a central aisle. On each side of this were two or three steps leading up under two smaller arches to two raised aisles. As a flame from the fire at the end of the chamber flickered into life she saw, with a shock, two figures standing one on each side of the central arch. They stood motionless and sinister in complete silence. Two men in robes each holding something which might have been a weapon. Then she realized that they must be statues.

Suddenly at the far end of the temple - for such Penny now believed this place to be - somebody or something moved and for a moment blotted out her sight of the fire. She tried to scream, to struggle free from the invisible bonds that held her but remained a prisoner of her dream. Then she saw that

the figure was that of a man dressed in a single, long, light-coloured robe. He tended the fire and then glided soundlessly into the shadows.

Now she could hear behind her the chanting of male voices and the sound of marching steps approaching. The hall in which she was crouching grew lighter and then suddenly bright with flaming torches. Solemn singing filled the temple. There were men all round her, *walking through her without seeing her*. The creaking and clank of armour, the shuffle of sandals, the smoke of torches borne by men in Roman togas. Everything that was now happening was vivid and real. She was there - an invisible witness.

The torch-bearers were now lining each side of the central aisle, and although she was surrounded by soldiers somehow she could see the faces of those in white robes who were taking their places between them. *But they weren't faces*. Not ordinary faces. Their heads were enormous and inhuman. One was beaked like a raven with a great mop of hair, another was a snarling lion and several others, the most frightening of all, were completely blank. As she drew in her breath to cry out in the hope of breaking the dreadful spell everyone in the temple turned to face the fire at the far end of the central aisle.

The chanting ceased as if at a signal. The only sound now was the hiss and crackle of torches and the heavy breathing of men. The air was full of tension. They were waiting.

Suddenly the priest - the man in the light-coloured robe who had tended the fire - stepped forward silently and she could see now that behind the fire a large curtain or veil was hanging. The man raised his hand and the veil was drawn aside. With a great sigh, a rustle of garments and the clink of armour, every man except the torch-bearers prostrated himself while Penny in dreadful fascination stared at what the veil had hidden.

She saw a huge tablet of stone, gold-coloured and almost rippling in the glare of the torches. Carved into the stone in relief was a picture of a scene that she was never to forget. Although she was some distance away she could see it distinctly, perhaps through some trick of the light. Indeed, it seemed with some magical quality to glow.

The picture in stone showed a young man - or was he a god - wearing a conical peaked cap like that worn by the youth she had seen in the procession. The figure was kneeling on the back of a prostrate bull and holding its head back with the fingers of his left hand thrust into its nostrils. His right hand held a great knife which he had thrust into the back of the bull. On each side of the picture stood two torch-bearers which Penny realized were like the two statues on each side of the central arch of the temple. There were other carvings on the "picture", but she noticed only the agony of the bull and look of calm indifference on the face of the man-god.

In her dream she shuddered at the thought that she was about to witness the sacrifice of something living and she prayed that she might wake and be released from this horror. Suddenly a great flash of light illumined the temple and she was half deafened by a crash that broke the spell and woke her.

With thumping heart and with tears streaming down her face she sat up on the turf as another mighty peal of thunder crashed overhead and the black clouds above the Marsh were split with lightning.

She stumbled to her feet and realized that she was alone.

"Jon! Jon!" she shouted hysterically as she stumbled into the darkness of the wood.

## 4. The Smuggler's Rest

Just over a mile to the north of Amorys, and standing well back from the road was an old inn called the Smuggler's Rest. It is a low-pitched, straggling house with whitewashed walls and several shabby sheds and outbuildings at the rear.

It is probable that this isolated building was once a tollhouse with a toll-gate across the road, for still on the wall today is a board with faded lettering stating the toll to be levied on carriages, horses, cattle, sheep and pigs.

About twenty-four hours after the great thunderstorm which had broken over the Marsh and swept over east Sussex and Kent, Leslie Dale and the girl Valerie were sitting on a bench against the wall of the inn. They were both smoking cigarettes, and drinks were on the rough wooden table in front of them. It was a pleasant evening and the inn sign, showing an evil-looking man with a patch over his eye, lounging at ease with a keg of brandy at his feet, was creaking above their heads.

Neither of them looked particularly happy in the other's company and both seemed out of place in a remote country inn.

"Well, Les," Valerie said as she stubbed out her cigarette. "It's no use sulking just because you can't find anybody round here who will talk about Roman remains. You know more than they do anyway. And it's no use fussing because that old fool Bolshaw won't let us into his house by turning out a party already booked in. You're not going to like what I'm going to say, but your approach to these yokels is all wrong. You shout and bluster and think everybody is going to do what you want just because you're in a hurry. People down here don't hurry. Surely you can see that for yourself?"

Les flushed under his gingery beard and banged his beer mug on the table.

"O.K. O.K. Maybe you're right. Maybe you can handle people better than I can, but at least you'll agree that we've got to get into Amorys just as soon

as we can. I mean soon, tonight maybe, even if old Bolshaw has got those kids there. We must get in from the field by the road and look round."

"*You* can, dear. I'll do almost anything for you, but I will not go blundering about in woods and bushes with stinging nettles and brambles in the dark. Exploring at night is just not my thing. What we really want is more evidence. Didn't you say this afternoon that somebody in Stone told you that this boy here, George Crump, was the kid who found something the other day?"

"Yes they did. We'd better get at him. It's important to know where he found this spoon. I asked his mother where he was when I came in, but she just looked stupid and said she didn't know. They're a poor lot here, Val. The old man, who I suppose is the boy's grandfather, looks half crazy and they all glare at you without saying anything half the time."

Valerie lit another cigarette.

"Not so loud," she whispered. "Granpa is in the bar now and I'm sure he's not as dense as he looks. I wouldn't be surprised if he isn't quite a cunning old man. Trouble here is that the place is falling to pieces. They just don't seem to do any business. They must be really broke, Les, and even if we haven't got much money I don't see why we shouldn't suggest that they might like to sell us some information. The boy, by the way, has just come back. I saw him while you were upstairs and he's probably in the kitchen with his mum. Go into the bar and buy two packets of crisps for the dear little boy and I'll get him out here and we'll talk to him. Or rather I'll talk to him. Will you leave this to me, Les? I don't want you to upset him."

Les nodded and went into the bar. He was moodily chewing a crisp himself, when Val came round the corner of the house followed by Master George Crump.

George was not an attractive boy. It was not perhaps his fault that his plump face was rather pimply for he was at the pimply age. But he was a greedy lad who was spoiled by his doting mother. She fed him on food he liked but which was bad for him. He was always eating, and even now his jaws were

working rhythmically as Valerie urged him forward until his eyes glinted at the sight of the crisps.

"Les dear," she said brightly. "This is George, and he's a good sport because he's promised to help us find our way about round here just because it's our first visit. Move up, Les, and let George sit down next to you. He must be hungry so pass him the crisps. Help yourself, George, and this is Mr. Dale, my boy friend."

Les managed to fix his face into a mirthless grin of welcome while George grabbed a handful of crisps and gave him a brief nod. Valerie sat on the edge of the table and regarded the boy without enthusiasm. He was wearing slacks which were much too tight for him, a grubby checked "cowboy" shirt and a wind-cheater. His eyes were small, bright and restless, and he never looked up at the person to whom he was speaking.

Valerie gave him one of her most winning smiles, but this introduction to a serious interview was wasted because George's eyes were fixed on the crisps.

"Now George," she said. "I'm sure you don't mind us calling you George, but we want to be friends because we want your help. Your mother will have told you that we're strangers here, and we've heard you're a very smart chap and will be able to tell us some of the things we want to know."

She paused, feeling that she was doing all the talking, and eventually George, without lifting his eyes, uttered.

"That's right," he said with his mouth full. "Tha's ri'. I'm a smart chap O.K. I bin on the telly."

"Yes, George. We heard that. Wish we'd seen you. You found something interesting didn't you? An old silver spoon, wasn't it?"

Silence - except for the champing of George's jaws.

Valerie tried again. "A spoon was it? Or old Roman coins? Mr. Dale here is an expert on these things. He'd like to see your find very much, wouldn't



you, Les?"

Les, who seemed surprised at being addressed, passed the remains of the crisps across the table.

"Have some more crisps, old boy. What about a drink? I'd certainly like to see that spoon you found. You showed it on the telly, I suppose?"

"Yus," said George, "Tha's ri'. I showed 'un. I don't mind some more crisps. And a coke. I likes a coke this time o' day."

Valerie flashed a meaning look at Les who went into the inn and reappeared with three more bags of crisps and a Coca-Cola. He placed these offerings grimly before his guest and ignoring Valerie sat down opposite him.

"Now look here, my lad. While you're refreshing yourself, just listen to me. My guess is that you're a business-like chap. Because I'm interested in this sort of thing I'd like to have a look at your spoon and at anything else old that you've found round here. Now George, I'm prepared to do business with you. Big business. Maybe you'd like a new bike and I don't see why you shouldn't have one if you'll show me that spoon and *where you found it*. That's what I want to know, George. *Where did you find it?*"

George put down his empty glass, and actually glanced for a second or two at his questioner who was now putting his hand in his pocket. He opened his mouth to speak, but history will never know what he was going to say because his grandfather, who must have been listening just inside the door of the bar, stepped outside and took control of the situation.

"Inside, George," he drawled. "Time for your supper. Your mum's waitin' for yer. Get inside quick... *Inside I said.*"

George grabbed two bags of crisps and with a malevolent look at his grandfather, sauntered as slowly as he dared round the side of the house. Meanwhile the old man remained standing in the doorway and seemed to be waiting for either Valerie or Les to speak. They did not, and indeed for once they were both embarrassed. Eventually the old man put his hands in his pockets and stepped out into the sunshine.

He was a striking-looking old man - spare and tall, with a lean, tanned clean-shaven face and bushy eyebrows above alert blue eyes. He could well have been seventy years of age but he walked without any stoop like a much younger man.

Les and Valerie had of course seen him about the house before, but it was his widowed daughter-in-law, George's mother, with whom they had done business and who served their meals. Now, as he looked down at them, they both felt a little awkward and uncertain as to how to deal with him.

"Thur were no call fur to do that," he said in a surprisingly deep voice. "You doan't need to feed that lazy young rascal. His ma kin still manage to keep him alive. You be interested in all this Roman lark I hear you say? You doan't want to take no notice of what young George says."

"Oh, don't we," Les said lamely. "He did find something the other day, didn't he? He was on the telly and there was something in the papers. D'you mean to say that spoon he found was a fake? This sort of thing is my job and I was only asking to see it. Sit down here with us and have a drink, Mr. Crump."

"Arrr!" said the old man. "Granpa they calls me hereabouts. Granpa Charlie. I won't have no drink now thankee, but I'll sit down. Now young gennulman. What was you botherin' that boy about?"

So Les tried again to explain why he wanted to know where Romans remains were being found in Oxney. It was his "subject", he explained. He was a teacher. He was writing a book about the Romans.

"Arrr!" said Granpa. "Clever young chap you be. Very smart. Now this grandson o' mine. Young George. It be true that he found a thing or two. Looking for plovers' eggs round Easter he was the first time, but he doan't know much. He be too young. Now, young gennulman, if you really wants to know about this Roman stuff you'd better be askin' someone like ole Granpa Charlie who's lived hereabouts for sixty year or more."

This was clear enough. Granpa knew more than George and knew too that Les wanted information very badly. The point was whether Granpa was

bluffing and really did know something important, and if so would he give the information for nothing. That seemed doubtful, and then Granpa made himself clearer still.

"Maybe a clever young chap like you with all this learning an' who is going to write a book, would be glad to know something that nobody else knows."

Les nodded cautious agreement with this profound statement, and Granpa went on. "That be what I reckoned. And I reckon a clever chap would be glad to hand a bit o' help to someone who knows where young George found that old spoon - and someone who knows a right lot more besides about these Roman trinkets and where they be."

"Yes, Granpa," Les said eagerly. "That's right. I'd be glad to help. How could I help you?"

The old man got up. "Arrr! That be the point. A smart chap like you could easy see that an old pub like this doan't make no money. Can't scrape a living now. I be getting old for this job and sitting about waiting for customers what doan't come... Retoire. That's what I be goin' to do when I can get a bit o' help for what I knows some clever chap wants. And I knows some hidden places around here. There's old houses and secrets too... Yus, young gennulman. That's what I be ready to do now. Sell the old Smuggler and retoire."

At that moment an old saloon car, which seemed to be full of young people, drove slowly past, stopped, and then reversed on to the patch of rough grass between the road and the inn. Granpa, with customers in sight, retired to the bar and Les, who had his back to the road, got up to see what was happening. A middle-aged man was at the wheel, but to his amazement the first two out of the car were the lanky boy and the pretty red-haired girl he had seen at Amorys yesterday. They recognized him at the same moment, but a noise behind made him turn round. Valerie, without a word, was going indoors. Then the rear door of the car opened and a boy and a girl of about eleven - the most obvious twins he had ever seen - jumped out and were followed by a black Scottie dog. As the twins were both wearing brown jeans and yellow sweaters it was only possible to tell them apart by the girl's longer and curlier hair. They stood side by side looking at Les, and

then the girl called over her shoulder, "Come on, David. Bring Fred too and we can all have a drink here to cheer us on our weary way. Is our weary way much longer, Jonathan?"

Jon, who was watching Les warily and regretting this chance meeting, merely shook his head. Then Fred Vasson from the Dolphin got out of the driving seat and was followed by a good-looking boy of seventeen, obviously the twins' brother.

Penny broke an awkward silence, for there seemed no sense pretending that they had not seen Les before, when he had so obviously recognized them.

"Good evening," she said. "If you're not actually using all this table do you mind if we sit down?"

Les nodded rudely, got up and moved over to the doorway. He was puzzled because the roof of the car was piled with luggage and so they were obviously just arriving from somewhere and presumably had not been at Amorys all day. He was also angry because if he had known that, he might well have got into Bolshaw's grounds without interference from the old man. He was also annoyed because Valerie had deserted him and because Granpa Charlie had now come out of the inn and was fussing round the table where the girl and the twins were sitting. Leslie Dale was certainly an intelligent young man, but one of his greatest failings was that he could not keep his temper. What he should have done now was to go indoors, find out what was the matter with Valerie and leave the field to these invading children. But he wanted to know more about them and whether they had come here deliberately. So he stayed where he was and that was his first mistake.

Then Jon, with his friend David Morton and Fred Vasson, strolled up while he glared at them with hostility. Jon nodded, and David, who had heard the story of the Warrenders' adventure of yesterday, guessed the identity of the scruffy young man.

Penny smiled at Jon and looked meaningfully at Les who was now biting a finger nail. Then she said provocatively, "I hope we haven't taken your seat. Hadn't you got a friend with you? I hope we haven't driven her away."

"Sit where you like for all I care," Les muttered. "Luckily kids aren't allowed inside the pub, and so far as I'm concerned it's a pity they're allowed to sit around outside. Granpa! Isn't there a law to prevent you serving kids just out of nursery?"

In the silence that followed this charming speech, Les realized that everybody there, including Granpa Charlie, was staring at him in surprise. Then, for the first time since they got out of the car one of the twins spoke. Dickie Morton got up, walked round the table, stood by his brother and looked Les up and down as if he had never seen anyone like him before - which was true!

"Well!" he said. "Did you hear that, everybody? This man is very rude."

"Shut up," David said quietly. "Don't take any notice. Let's have some drinks," and at this cue Granpa, anxious to avoid trouble, stepped forward. When he passed Les on his way back to the bar the latter said, "Bring me a beer."

Then Mary jumped up and wailed, "Selfish brutes you all are. Where's my darling Mackie? Nobody cares. You've got him locked up in the hot car, or else he's running all the way back to London where he lives 'cos he hates it here."

David, used to this sort of thing, took no notice, but Jon and Penny looked surprised. Vasson assured them that the dog was not in the car, so Mary and Dickie went over to the side of the inn calling and whistling. Mackie soon appeared, wagging his tail, licking his chops and looking very pleased with himself. Mary picked him up and kissed his black nose while Dickie showed her the notice on the wall of the inn about toll charges.

Les was still leaning against the doorpost with one eye on the group at the table, when Macbeth strolled over to him without evil intent and sniffed at his ankles. Some dogs seem to know when they are not welcome and Mackie was usually quick to sense antagonism or fear in a human. This time he must have been thinking of something else - possibly of the scraps of food he had just found outside the kitchen door.

So he sniffed curiously at the ankles of a stranger who, suddenly aware of what was going on, cursed and pushed the little dog away with his foot. It was not so much a kick as an indignity, and Macbeth was not the sort of dog who would suffer either. With a snarl he went into battle and fastened his teeth into the bottom of one of Les's narrow trousers. Then his enemy made another mistake and kicked him hard with the pointed shoe of his other foot. Mackie only grunted and, as the twins and Vasson ran forward, his tail was wagging with the joy of battle.

"Don't you dare do that again," Mary raged at Les who was about to kick the little dog again. *"Come here at once, Mackie. Come off!"*

Then Vasson who understood dogs, and had always liked Macbeth, stooped, grabbed him and pulled him free with a piece of Les's trousers still between his jaws. He then carried the protesting animal to the car and shut him in. From his prison the outraged Macbeth continued to bark defiance.

"Dangerous dog like that shouldn't be allowed off a lead," Les gasped. "I shall report this to the police - if there are police in this one-eyed hole. And one of you, or all of you, will have to buy me a new pair of trousers."

David who had now joined the furious twins said quietly, "That's nonsense and you know it. We're sorry if the dog has torn your trousers but it was your own fault. He wasn't doing you any harm. He was just being friendly and you shoved him away with your foot... And there's no need for you twins to say any more."

"Oh, isn't there," Mary said indignantly. "We haven't started saying anything yet to this great disgusting big bully. Kicking little friendly helpless dogs! That's what he does. Helpless and friendly little animals..."

"...Whose hearts are full of love for all mankind," her twin added surprisingly and certainly untruthfully.

On the bench Penny nudged Jon and whispered, "They're back to form, Jon. Shall we keep Ginger Whiskers here or let him escape to his girl friend?"

"Keep him here. He might give something away and here comes the old man with the drinks."

He got up and went over to the group at the door as Granpa put the tray on the table.

"Come on, David," he said. "Bring the twins over here and sit down," and then to Dale, "Don't take too much notice of those two. The dog belongs to them and didn't mean any harm. Your drink is on the table so you might as well have it with us."

Les was so surprised that his mouth fell open. David frowned while the twins looked at Jon as they would at a traitor. Jonathan, supposed to be their friend, was actually inviting this scruffy-looking bully of little dogs to sit down with them! And what was even worse was his suggestion that he should take no notice of their just complaint! Then they glanced at each other. Obviously both had the same idea at the same time, because Mary nodded and Dickie dashed to open the car door so that Macbeth could finish the good work and put his enemy to flight. David caught him just in time while the dog tried to hurl himself through the window.

Dickie was near angry tears as David gripped his arms and led him back to the table.

"Drink your coke and don't be so silly. Please don't put on an act now," he said quietly, and then as he saw Dale sitting down and gulping his beer, "And don't fuss, Mary. I think Jon wants something out of that chap."

Mary was too upset to answer, but after a quick glance at her twin they went over quietly to the others and sat down together. Granpa was paid for the drinks and then he moved over to the doorway and stood there in the sun. He seemed to want to know what was happening, and like many others was half-hypnotized by the twins. Secretly too he was amused by Mackie's fighting spirit, and it would have been interesting to know just exactly what he thought about Les Dale and the hard-faced young woman who had hurried indoors when the car arrived.

Meanwhile Penny, looking pale and tired, and wishing that she was elsewhere, watched the twins suspiciously. They were much too quiet and she doubted if they had yet finished with Les. She was right.

When Mary had poured her drink into her glass she smiled winningly at Granpa.

*"Please, Mr. Innkeeper - and we're so sorry that we don't know your name - please have you got any straws? My twin an' me always suck our drinks through straws."*

Dickie flashed her a wicked grin.

*"That's it, sir. Of course that's what's wrong. Jus' for a sec I was saying to myself what a lovely drink this looked. I was saying to myself that all the afternoon the one thing I wanted most in the world was a nice cool coke... Don't glare at us, David. We can speak, can't we? I'm only trying to be polite to this, to this-----"*

*"Noble old gentleman,"* Mary finished for him. *"That's what he is. I've been trying to think of the word, twin. I'll give it you now for nothing. Noble is the word."*

*"So it is, twin. Thank you very much. Please Mr. Nobleman have you got any spare straws for sucking through? I'll tell you what. You just show me where those old straws are kept and I'll carry them for you."*

*"It's not because you're old that we'd like to carry them for you,"* Mary added. *"It's because you're so nice - much, much nicer than some people sitting round the table outside this historic tavern."*

Even Les seemed impressed by this nonsense and nobody spoke as Granpa, in a trance-like state went indoors for the straws, while Penny choked over a mouthful of orange squash. She was still spluttering when the old man came back with the carton of straws and put them in front of the twins who thanked him rapturously. Granpa then returned to the doorpost and Les made a big decision. He was going to do all he could to be pleasant to these kids. He would "play along with them" until he had found out why they had



come to Amorys, whether they knew anything about Roman remains and how long they were going to stay.

So he put down his beer and smiled at Jon and Penny.

"Funny seeing you two here like this. After yesterday I mean, down at that crazy old man's house. You staying there now?"

Before he had finished speaking and before Jon had recovered from the shock of the smile and the almost human approach, they were interrupted by a loud, rude, gurgling noise. Both the twins had their heads bent over their glasses with straws in their mouths but the liquid in Dickie's glass was still bubbling.

Les tried to pretend that he had not heard anything unusual but the others were not deceived. Fred Vasson, who had no time for the sandy-whiskered gentleman grinned at Penny. Little devils! he thought.

"Staying at Amorys now are you?" Les persisted.

"Yes, we are," admitted Jon.

"You won't like it," Les went on. "That old Major is a real crank. Couldn't you see for yourselves yesterday? He isn't capable of looking after himself let alone anybody else... *Will you kids shut up?*"

Again he had been interrupted by the rude, burbling noise from the two glasses in front of the twins who looked up in innocent surprise.

"If you're talking to us in that most uncourteous way," Dickie said sadly, "please jolly well don't."

And Mary added, "We are unused to such rudery... What's the matter with you, Fred? You are very red in the face."

Les gulped, well aware that he too was red in the face, but tried again.

"You don't want to stay at Amorys. You must have seen for yourself that he's not fit to look after himself."

"Yes. We noticed that," Penny said sweetly. "Why were you so keen to stay there, may we ask? It's very kind and considerate of you to warn us, but you still want to go there, don't you?"

"Ridiculous. Of course we don't want to stay there. Nobody in their senses would. The old man is crackers and been much worse since his wife died. Ask Granpa here. He's lived here all his life... Granpa! You wouldn't advise these youngsters to stay at Amorys, would you? The old fool is advertising 'Board Residence' and he can't even look after himself, can he?"

Granpa Charlie stroked his long chin and Jon, who was watching him, caught a shrewd gleam in his eye.

"Arrr!" said Granpa. "The old Major, eh? Maybe he is a bit touched now. No sense in living up there by hisself. Always was a bit queer. Doan't see as how he could look after anybody else."

"There you are," Les said triumphantly. "What did I tell you? Quite the wrong place to take these----"

His last words were interrupted by a fresh outburst of gurgling and eruptive noises.

" 'Straordinary thing," Dickie said as he raised his head. "Most 'straordinary. My straw is making the most peculiar noises. Maybe it's an old-fashioned straw? Have you had these straws in stock a long time, Mr. Granpa?"

Granpa Charlie looked at the twins with extreme dislike. "If you two wuz anything to do with me I'd see to it that neither of you could sit comfortable for a week," he muttered.

Mary smiled sweetly. "What a shame! We've nothing to do with you at all and we don't know what you mean about sitting comfortable unless it's this old seat of yours which isn't if you know what we mean... David dear. Please could we have another coke each? We're very thirsty today."

Before David could answer Penny stood up and silenced the twins with a look.

"I think we've been here long enough," she said. "Not what I would call a really happy party and I want to go now. Just one thing I would like to tell you," she added, facing Les across the table. "It's true that Major Bolshaw is not a very happy man, and no doubt he'd seem *to you* a little odd, but we're not going to Amorys so that he can look after us. *We're going to look after him.*"

Granpa Charlie went in to the bar and Les turned to watch him. The twins exchanged a look, sucked up the biggest possible mouthful of liquid through their straws and then, aiming at the back of their enemy's neck they discharged their ammunition with force and remarkable accuracy. Never can Leslie Dale have been more surprised, for the attack was silent and unexpected. He put his hand to his neck and brought his fingers away damp and sticky. When he looked back the girl, the two older boys and the man were already moving towards their car, while the twins were still seated and watching him with wide-eyed innocence.

He knew he had been made to look a fool, but he had something still to suffer. Dickie suddenly stood up and pointed to the old notice of toll charges on the wall of the inn.

"Hi!" he shouted. "Hi, Mr. Dogkicker. You got twopence in your pocket?"

Les, looking very bewildered, instinctively put his hand in his pocket while the twins roared with laughter.

"You'll want twopence if you go out on the road," Dickie yelled. "Look at the notice, old Dogkicker. It says that two pigs cost fourpence so you can work it out for yourself," and they raced for the car feeling that Macbeth had been avenged.

Les, wiping his neck with a grubby handkerchief, stormed into the bar. Granpa was polishing glasses, but he had seen everything through the window and watched him warily. So far as he was concerned everything was developing rather prettily.

"Those kids!" gasped Les. "I suppose you know they're staying at Amorys? Now look here, Granpa. We were talking sense before that lot arrived. You

said you wanted some help and I'm willing to help you but you've got to tell me what I want to know."

Granpa did not speak. He just nodded - a nod that meant nothing. Les leaned across the bar.

"What do you know about Amorys? Anywhere round there that George found that spoon? Was it there that he found something Eastertime? Is Amorys the old house you were talking about? Come on now, Granpa."

Granpa looked out of the window as if to make sure that the car had gone. It had.

"I'm gettin' old," he mumbled. "I 'as to be prop'ly reminded to remember. Stop botherin' me for a while. I wants to think... Let me be."

Les took the hint and went upstairs. Valerie was standing by the window but as soon as he had closed the door she wheeled round and snapped, "Were those the kids that were staying at Amorys?"

"Yes. What's wrong with that? And what happened to you anyway? What was the idea of you clearing out without a word? I could have done with you just now."

"You looked as if you could have done with some help. I was watching you from behind the curtain and it certainly didn't look as if you were in control of the situation. Les. I think our luck is out and the best thing we can do is to get back to London. Do you think any of them saw me?"

"What's the matter with you, Val? They're only a bunch of schoolkids but the tall lanky chap and the redhead were at Amorys yesterday. I told you about them, but I'm not sure if they've been there all today. They had a load of luggage on the old car and I believe they were only just arriving. Anyway what are you fussing about? I shouldn't think any of them saw more than your back. Anyone might think you were scared of them."

"Sometimes you're a fool, Les. Stop fidgeting and fussing about and sit down and listen to me. I know those youngsters and the trouble is that they

would probably remember me. That's why I cleared out. Remember Aunt Em saying she didn't want anything to do with any funny business round here? Well she did - and with good reason. We've been in trouble before with that lot. They're smart and so is their dog. His memory is long too and you made a fool of yourself with him. The two you saw at Amorys yesterday live in Rye at the Gay Dolphin where we once had some trouble - and we've met since more than once. The car and its driver both belong to the Dolphin too, and I think it's been to meet the other three with the dog and probably came round this way to Oxney to give them a run round instead of driving straight from Rye. What you've got to understand is that if any of that lot recognize me, they won't think I'm here on my honeymoon."

"But you might be. You're not doing anything wrong, and even if they do recognize you I don't suppose they'll come this way again."

"Don't you really? And what do you think I'm going to do all day. Sit indoors here and knit? Why are you so keen on Amorys? You've got no proof that anything is to be found there. I say let's call it a day and clear out of here."

"I'm not going to leave until I've made a thorough search of Amorys," Les said stubbornly. "It's true I've no actual proof yet but I'm sure that old Granpa knows something. I'm certain he's got information to sell and if we're smart we can get him to work with us. He wants money and I'm sure I can persuade him to talk when I get the chance. Sure of it. No, Val. Amorys is important, and I'm not going to give up until I've searched the place and all the land and that wood. We must get those kids and Bolshaw out of the way somehow or other - and quickly too, because the publicity given to George's discovery is sure to send other experts down here... Listen, Val. I know you're not the sort to give up when we're on the verge of something big. You won't let me down now, will you? I've got plenty of ideas how you can help and keep out of trouble too. And plenty of ideas how to get rid of that rabble at Amorys."

## 5. The Lone Piners Arrive

Jon drove the Lone Piners away from the Smuggler's Rest. Fred Vasson was crammed into the back seat with David, Dickie and Macbeth, while Penny described herself as "lolling in luxury" with Mary in the front. Vasson did not like being driven in the car which he considered to be virtually his own and was thankful that Mrs. Warrender had not allowed Jon to keep it for the holiday. He was also worried about what had happened at the inn and wondering how much of these curious goings-on he should tell Mrs. Warrender when he got back to the Dolphin.

Penny must have guessed his thoughts because she turned and yelled over her shoulder, as everybody except Fred seemed to be talking loudly at the same time.

"I can see you in the mirror, Fred. You're looking gloomy and disapproving. We all know that you'd much prefer to be driving but if Jon hasn't lost his way we'll be there any moment now... There's really nothing to worry about and you can forget that ginger-whiskered type. You needn't tell Mrs. Warrender about him either, or what the twins did to him. She might worry. You can come into the house with us and meet the Major, and then you can see for yourself that we'll be all right. That business at the inn doesn't mean anything. It was just that the chap with the beard wanted to stay at Amorys, but we got there first."

And with that Jon drew up opposite Amorys and said, "This is it, twins. Please open the gate so I can drive in."

"Why don't you drive *through* it?" Dickie said as he got out. "Were you saying your prayers, twin, all the time Jon was driving? I was. I bet Fred was, too. Now our prayers are answered and we can walk on dry land once again."

"What are we going to *do* here?" Mary said as they trotted together down the lane towards the house. "I s'pose its a good idea to look after this old

man although it sounds a peculiar sort of holiday... Look, Dickie. There he is."

The old house was glowing in the evening sunshine, and Major Bolshaw with a sickle in his hand was standing in front of the porch. He had been cutting back the weeds sprouting between the stones on the terrace while he waited for his guests. The twins ran ahead of the car and were the first to greet him as he dropped the sickle and raised his eyeglass.

"We're Richard and Mary Morton," Dickie said. "Good evening sir. I bet they warned you about us, but you mustn't take too much notice of Jon and Penny."

"Bless my soul!" the Major said. "Remarkable. Delighted to see you both. Come from London, haven't you? Everything in that car belong to you? Ah! Here's Penelope. How's the foot, my dear?"

Then David was introduced and in thanking the Major for having them he delighted him by saying how much he liked the house and how much he enjoyed clearing up gardens. This was not strictly true but, like the Warrenders, the three Mortons took to the Major immediately.

While Vasson was struggling with the luggage on the roof of the car the old man walked across to help him. Fred stepped back smartly and came to attention.

"Evening, sir."

The Major beamed at him and then shook hands. "Old soldier, eh? Name? Sergeant Vasson. Sussex Regiment. Splendid. Come in and have a glass of beer. What have you got in the boot there, Jonathan?"

"Rations, sir. We've brought plenty with us so that we don't have to waste too much time shopping. My mother, who thinks you're crazy to have us, has been helpful. She knows what we like and there's plenty in the hotel stores. And we did a lot of shopping in Rye this morning. Come on, David. Lend a hand!" And the two boys staggered down the hall into the big kitchen with an enormous carton of food.

The Major was impressed by such efficiency but Penny could see that he was rather bewildered. "You'd better meet Macbeth and then you'll know the worst," she said to him. "Mary, bring Mackie over to pay his respects."

The little dog came at Mary's call and when the old man stooped to pat him he wagged his tail and licked his hand.

"Nice little dog," the Major said. "A fighter, I'll be bound. Good breeding there. I hope he likes Amorys."

"He loves it already," Mary said, looking up at him with big eyes. "And so do we. And now I've got a chance to ask you something very, very important. Vital acksherley. This is it. Although Mackie is growing his coat again after being stripped back in the summer he's very, very clean. Every day I brush him and he never smells doggy... Except sometimes when he gets wet," she added honestly.

"Quite natural, my dear. Not to worry. Good dogs like this should be groomed every day. What do you want to ask me?"

Mary took a deep breath. "He likes to sleep on my bed, sir. He's unhappy if he doesn't and so am I. He's very, very quiet in spite of his name."

"That's all right, my dear. Sleep where he likes except on my bed. What's his name got to do with it? Something to do with Scottish kings, eh?"

"Well, he is a Scottish king of course, but my father called him Macbeth when he was a puppy because he murdered sleep. I often tell people that. They're interested."

"Certainly they are," the Major agreed. "So am I. Very pleased to welcome his majesty Macbeth. Come and see your rooms. Hope you'll like them."

Only Penny had been upstairs before, so what the Major had to show them now was a surprise. The stairs and landing were of polished, uncarpeted oak, and the biggest room overlooking the front garden contained two beds for the older boys and a camp bed for Dickie. At the other end of the landing at the back of the house, the Major opened a door leading into the



most beautiful bedroom Penny had ever seen and it looked as if whoever had slept here would be back tonight. It was carpeted in grey and the four-poster bed had a blue chintz counterpane which matched the curtains. Under the diamond-paned window, against which a yellow rose was tapping, was a plain dressing-table with a glass top.

"My dear wife's room, Penelope. She would like you to have it. So would I. If Mary opens the door in the corner she'll find Macbeth's room. No doubt he will allow her to sleep in it too."

As Mary ran across to open the door into a powder closet just large enough for a small bed, Penny turned to the old man with tears in her eyes. She was suddenly too shy to speak the words she wanted to say. Instead she took one of his work-worn hands between her own, held it for a moment against her cheek and then kissed it. Jon, at the door, watched her and thought, "Nobody but Penny would do a thing like that."

The Major smiled at her and went out. Jon and David grabbed Dickie and took him along to their room to unpack and Penny and Mary were left alone.

Penny opened the window wide, picked a rose and gave it to Mary and for a few moments the two girls leaned on the sill and looked out in silence across the marsh. Then Mary, twirling the rose between her fingers looked up and said, "You're not really very happy, are you Penny? You're different and of course you're nearly grown up. Do you like it?"

"I think so," Penny said doubtfully. "But I won't be too grown-up to you, Mary. Do you like this place?"

"You told us about it this morning. The house is better than I thought. I like the old man here but hated those two men at the inn. I wish now we hadn't stopped there. Why is the dogkicker trying to come here?"

"We're not sure, Mary. He may really think that there is some Roman treasure hidden at Amorys. He's horrible and although you two were very wicked with those straws he deserved it."

"Yes, Penny. I know we were. It was one of those times when we both knew what we were going to do without saying anything. It's nearly always fun being a twin. But what do you and Jon think is going to happen? We can't be looking after that Major all the time, can we? And I jolly well hope we haven't got to slave in the garden... Penny! *Are you listening to me?* You're thinking of something else all the time."

Penny turned away from the window, covered her face with her hands and then flung herself across the bed. Mary ran to her and put her arms round her.

"Tell me, darling Penny. Why are you like this? What's wrong? You're crying!"

Penny sat up and blinked away some tears.

"I don't think you'd understand, Mary. I tried to tell Jon last night, but I didn't and I haven't spoken to him about it again."

"I'll try to. Just because Dickie and me talk a lot of nonsense sometimes when we're together or with strangers, that doesn't mean we're silly. I might understand much more than you think I understand about you and Jon. And we are the only two girls here."

"So we are, Mary," Penny said as she sat up and gave her a hug. "I'll try to tell you. Last night when Jon and I were down beyond the wood in a wonderful little place which we thought would do for a camp----"

"You told us about that. What happened?"

"It was just before that storm and it was hot and heavy and thundery. I had a headache and I went to sleep and had the most vivid and frightening dream about Roman soldiers marching up a beach and singing. I can see them now, Mary, with their hard, brown faces in round helmets, their armour creaking and their spears gleaming in the sunset... That wasn't so bad though, except that it seemed as if I was right there. The nightmare part that came next was so horrible. I was in a dark place and... No, Mary. I'm not

going to tell you any more. It's just that I can't forget it and it all seems to have something to do with this house."

"Perhaps it's haunted?" Mary said, wide-eyed, and at that moment there came a bang on the door.

"You girls unpacked?" David called. "May we come in? We've got an idea."

"No you can't," Penny answered. "Wait for us downstairs. We'll only be a few minutes."

David's idea was that they should give a dinner party in honour of Major Bolshaw on the first night of their holiday.

"He's been in the kitchen with Vasson drinking beer," he went on. "Fred had to go without saying 'Goodbye' to you girls and now the Major is somewhere out in the front. You're his favourite, Penny. Go and ask him if we can use the dining room. Mrs. Warrender has given us so much food that I'm sure you can provide a good dinner. We'll all help."

It was dusk and the bats were fluttering above the hedgerows as Penny ran out with Macbeth. The Major was leaning on the top bar of his gate but he stooped to pat Mackie when the dog jumped up at him. While Penny was telling him their idea, they heard a car coming towards them from the north. It slowed down as it approached, almost as if it wanted to turn in and, for a moment, Penny wondered if Vasson had forgotten something and come back for it. Then she realized that Vasson would have gone down the hill which she had limped up last evening, and turned right to go to Rye the quickest way.

"Of course you may, my dear," the Major began, and then stopped as the car drew up on the other side of the lane. Under the trees it was too dark to see more than the blur of the driver's face, and as the engine was still running noisily he had to raise his voice to offer help. "Lost your way? Where d'you want to go?"

The only answer was the sudden dazzling beam of a torch flashing in their eyes. Penny turned her face away and the car accelerated immediately and

was round the corner before she could see the number.

"Insolent rascal," the Major muttered. "Must have been a stranger. Don't see many people up this way... Haven't used dining room in months. You're very welcome. Enough silver in sideboard but may need cleaning. Splendid idea. Time for a little gaiety. Very pleased you're here, Penelope."

"Penny is the name, sir, when you're pleased with me. Only my father and my aunts call me Penelope when they're cross. Please don't be cross with any of us tonight." And then, because she was not quite sure that the driver of the car was a stranger, she added, "Don't come in for half an hour until we've dealt with the dining room, and then we'll want about another hour to get ready and into our party clothes, although I don't suppose that the boys have brought suits. Why don't you take Mackie down to the copse? He likes you and he might catch you a rabbit."

Penny, on her way back to the house, wondered whether Macbeth might catch something else. Something that might have been a dogkicker and who Mackie would certainly know again!

The furniture in the dining room was thick with dust but David - who often went antique-hunting in London with his father in the holidays - believed that if the Major cared to sell what was in this room many of his financial troubles would be over. In the sideboard they found some beautiful china which the boys carried carefully into the kitchen to wash, and Mary discovered a heavy silver candlestick in a corner.

So they set to work. The boys cleaned and polished as best they could although it seemed that the Major only possessed two dusters, while Penny and Mary went through the stores. Mary was more used to helping in the house and not nearly so slapdash as Penny, but between them they produced a very good meal, mostly out of tins. They had plenty of bread and had also brought tomatoes and fresh fruit, but they were puzzled what to have for a sweet.

After they had been busy for half an hour they heard Mackie barking in the distance, but Mary explained that this was his happy bark and a few minutes later he arrived on the doorstep with the Major.

"Nice, intelligent little dog," the latter said. "Too dark to see much now although moon will be up later. Bless my soul! Place looks as if we've got to withstand a siege. We going to eat all this for dinner? Never seen so much food in the house before. Where can I sit down?"

"Not here, *please*," Penny said, "This is the cook's department and we want everything for dinner to be a surprise. I'm sure the boys won't have you in the dining room either. Please don't disturb them. They'll be glad of any excuse to stop working. You go to your room and have a nice doze and we'll call you when we're ready," and she took his arm and led him to the foot of the stairs. "Just for an hour or two we're in charge," she smiled. "It's good for you to have a change."

When she got back to the kitchen Mary had found a box of candles, so they took these into the dining room to see how the boys were getting on.

"I tried to draw the curtains, but they'll come off their hooks if I do," said David with a grin. "Glad you've found some candles. We'll dine by candlelight. Decided what we're going to eat yet? We're famished, exhausted and choked with dust and we'd like a little something now, wouldn't we, Dickie? Where's the old man?"

Penny told him and suggested that they now might go up to the bathroom and clean themselves. David took the hint and Mary went out whispering something to her twin. Jon followed Penny into the kitchen.

"You all right?" he said as he closed the door behind him. "Don't seem to have had much chance to talk to you today, what with one thing and another."

She was at the other side of the table and looked pale in the electric light, and when she had brushed back a curl from her forehead she had left a smudge of dust across it.

"I'm all right, thank you Jon - what with one thing and another. Why don't you go up and wash? Mary will help me to manage the rest, but when you're clean you can come and carve the ham and tongue."

He came round the table to her as she sat down suddenly and put her head in her hands.

"What's wrong, Penny? Got a headache or something? I'm sorry. I feel clumsy. What can I do?"

She smiled at him and put a hand on his. "I *am* being a fool, Jon. I'm so sorry."

"Why are you a fool?"

"Because I feel a bit like I did last night before the storm. I know it sounds silly but I'm sure it's something to do with this place. I can't forget that dream and I feel as if something is going to happen."

Before he could answer there were running footsteps down the hall and the door was flung back by the twins.

"We've got a smashing idea," Dickie began. Then, "Oh dear, dear. We *are* sorry. Pardon us. We disturb. Silly old us."

Penny laughed and stood up. "Come and disturb, twins. What's the idea?"

The idea was that if they could find a piece of white card they should draw up a menu to put in front of the Major's plate. Dickie had some talent for drawing and was now being encouraged both at home and at school.

"I brought my paint box," he admitted. "Mary can write in what we're going to eat and I'll draw pictures round the edge and top and bottom. I'll draw you all if you like. And Mackie of course. And that bullying brother of ours, but I can't draw anything unless we can find some card. Somebody look for that while I get my paints... If we're going to eat everything on the table we shall want a poster."

"But we haven't got anything to eat after the ham and tongue except dessert," Penny said. "We want to cook something besides the soup. We shan't seem to be very clever if we can't think of anything else."

"Easy," Jon said. "You girls want to keep your wits about you. Sardines on toast, of course. Make the toast first and butter the slices. Cut the crusts off the bread of course. Put the sardines - at least two fat ones each - on a bit of toast and pop 'em in the oven. Easy. Everybody likes sardines - specially me... Give me the tin opener now and I'll open two tins."

Penny agreed. Meanwhile Mary had found an old shoe box at the bottom of a cupboard and before anyone noticed she had taken the lid to give to Dickie for his menu.

Three quarters of an hour later Penny and Mary ran upstairs and knocked on the Major's bedroom door.

"Don't give up hope," Penny called. "Only about ten minutes while we change. Mary will fetch you."

The dinner certainly started happily enough. The glass and silver gleamed in the candlelight, and before Mary fetched the Major from his room Jon and David, grumbling at Penny because the plates were too hot, set steaming soup in front of each place. The three boys, although not in dark suits, looked reasonably respectable, and Penny in her green dress looked better and prettier than she had all day, although owing to the heat of the oven she was sure that her nose was shiny and glowing. Mary was beaming as she led their guest into the room.

The Major's entry was greeted with silence. He had paid them the compliment of wearing a dinner jacket and black tie. Although his shoulders were bowed, his eyeglass was firmly fixed, his white hair neatly parted and he looked a most distinguished old gentleman.

Penny spoke first. Her voice shook and Jon looked at her sharply as he realized that she was excited and upset.

"Welcome, sir," she said. "And thank you for having us. Will you please sit here at the head of your table."

For a few moments the Major looked dazed and he stopped just inside the door. It was as if he was looking back into the past when this room had once

looked as it did tonight. Only his adored wife was where this little redhead, who had limped into his life only yesterday, was now standing. He blinked back a tear, gave them all a quaint little bow, and then walked to his place. Then, rather to their surprise, he said a simple grace, and they all sat down.

"That card is for you sir," Dickie said quickly. "It's to tell you what's coming. It's what's called a meenew and you won't enjoy your meal unless you look at it first."

"Acksherley," Mary said, "Dickie designed it and painted it. We're all on there. I only wrote in the food. It's a souvenir of a great occasion - for you."

"It is indeed a great occasion. Thank you very much Richard and Mary. I'll examine it carefully when I've finished my soup."

Penny, who had just put her spoon to her lips and hurriedly withdrawn it, said quickly, "You've plenty of time, Major. I've served the soup too hot. *Please* don't try it yet. You can read the menu ten times through with safety."

The menu was certainly a noble effort, and was headed

#### BANQUET AT AMORYS, OXNEY

and under this Dickie had drawn and coloured a good representation of the house. He had also decorated the sides of the card with sketches of them all, but he was rather better at landscape than he was at people and his drawing of their guest was not very flattering although the eyeglass was prominent! At the bottom of the design was the Lone Pine symbol surrounded by a laurel wreath and when the Major asked the reason for this Mary said, in what she believed to be adult conversation:

"If you don't mind very much, please don't enquire further on that matter. It is confidential but we do not mean any offence. We hope you are going to like the food as much as the words and pictures. Have you looked at the words?"



"Certainly, my dear. Remarkable meal. Soup, cold ham and tongue, salad, potatoes, fruit salad and - bless my soul, my favourite savoury, sardines on toast. This is a banquet. Drink a toast to you all presently."

"And that reminds me," Dickie said. "Toast! I don't want to complain but we ought to have toast with the soup. Little squares of it. If I hadn't been busy with all that art work I would have reminded you girls. But they haven't done badly, have they, sir?"

The Major laughed and from that moment the meal was a success. Although David suggested that they should switch on the electric light so that they could see what they were eating, Penny insisted that candlelight was more romantic. As the meal progressed so the Major seemed to relax. Instead of speaking in short sentences as if on the parade ground, he listened with sympathetic interest to all they had to tell him about themselves and their families. Jon was the first to realize that he was cleverly drawing them out. It was true that he had taken them on trust yesterday and that since their arrival there had not really been time to get to know each other better. He was sure that the old man was pleased to have them here, and for somebody who had not had much experience of young people he was easily winning their confidence. Penny of course was not the sort of girl to hold anything back from anybody who liked her. She was flushed now and looking very pretty, and by the time the rather baked sardines on toast were brought in by David and Dickie, she had told him about her parents, her school and even a little more about the Dolphin than seemed necessary. Even David, who was a quiet sort of chap told him about their home in London and of their country cottage at Witchend in Shropshire.

"We've got very *special* friends up there," Mary broke in. "David has got Peter, who is a girl called Petronella whom we love very much, and then there's Jenny and Tom. We may be going up there later in these holidays."

"I see," the Major said gravely. "And is the pine tree something to do with Shropshire? I know I must ask no further questions about that, but I do want to ask you what you are all going to do every day here? Are you sure that you're not going to be bored? Nothing much to do. You haven't brought cycles, have you? There's a very infrequent bus from the village which will

take you down to the sea. Very glad to have you here but a bit worried about you. Could make a camp, of course."

It was at that moment that Macbeth, from the rug in front of the fireplace, began to bark. Penny, who was sitting with her back to the window opposite the Major, saw the monocle drop from his eye as he half rose from his chair. By now Mackie was dashing between the window and the closed door, indicating clearly that he wanted to get out of the room.

David opened the door and Mackie shot down the hall like a black bullet.

"Did you see anyone outside, sir?" he called over his shoulder. "I'll let the dog out."

He did so, and Mary followed her brother out into the neglected garden while the dog vanished into the shadows. The sky was now blazing with stars, but it was still too dark to see the drive or the gate.

"Did you see anyone at the window, Mary?" David said quietly.

"No. I wasn't looking. But Mackie did. Somebody was watching us from outside. Now he's barking again. There *is* somebody there, David," and she ran forward up the drive, calling the dog.

David followed, and what happened next was so unexpected that he missed the chance of catching the mysterious visitor. He was only a few yards behind his sister when the beam of a torch, held by somebody near the gate, swung towards them, spot-lighting first Macbeth, who was apparently approaching the enemy cautiously and then Mary, who in her light coloured dress was easier to see. The beam was focused on the ground for a few seconds and Macbeth stopped barking. Then there was the crash of a stone on the ground just ahead of him as the light swung up again. The idiot was throwing stones!

"Stop it, you fool!" David shouted, and at that moment Mary cried out in pain and fell. The light went out, and as David went over to his sister he heard the gate slam, the sound of running footsteps in the lane and Macbeth again barking in fury.

Mary was not badly hurt, but if the stone had hit her head she most certainly would have been.

"It's my knee, David," she gulped as he lifted her up. "*He was throwing stones at Mackie.* It must be someone gone mad. He was only being brave and guarding us like he always does. Call him back now and we'd better go inside and finish the party."

"Mackie will come back," David said grimly. "We'll have a look at you first. Can you walk?"

Mary giggled. "I'd love to say I want to be carried, but I can walk although I'm sore wounded. Shall we tell the Major what happened or will it spoil his evening? It's only a graze, David. Honestly. There's Dickie at the door now."

"Of course we must tell him whether it spoils his evening or not. I'm sorry for the old boy living here alone, Mary, but we can't stay here if the place is going to be full of lunatics throwing stones. Here's Mackie. Good boy! Brave boy!"

Macbeth fawned on them both and the three returned to the house where they were met by Dickie. "You're a traitor, twin," Mary said as she exaggerated her limp. "Why didn't you come too at the call of danger? Look at me now. Sore wounded - or sore anyhow - by some lout throwing stones at darling Mackie."

The whole incident had taken only a few minutes, and the Major was helping Penny with coffee in the kitchen when they trooped back into the hall. Mary's knee was sympathetically examined but it was only grazed, and a strip of plaster seemed to be all that was needed.

"Coffee in the sitting room," the Major said. "Log fire laid. Light it at once. Don't often use the room but you will while you're here."

The big room smelled rather musty but there were two easy chairs and a sofa. Fortunately the logs which were laid on fir cones blazed up quickly. Macbeth curled up in front of the flames happily and Penny was thankful to

sit down next to Jon. She was tired and still feeling uneasy about something she could not explain even to herself.

Afterwards when they all talked over the events of this remarkable day, they agreed that it was from the time they sat down to have coffee together that the Major began to change. In the dining room he seemed to have forgotten his troubles and his loneliness in his interest in them, but for the rest of the evening his mind was only half with them.

It was David who, after drawing the curtains across the windows told the Major bluntly what had happened when they had run out into the darkness after Macbeth.

"There's no doubt of it, sir. Mackie, who is a very good watchdog, either heard a step outside the window or sensed that somebody was there. Whoever it was heard him and ran away, stopped by your gate, and with a torch spotted the dog, and probably Mary, and started to throw stones... Are you near the village here? And what about telling the police? Who would be likely to want to get in here and then be such a fool as to throw stones at a dog and a girl who were only interested in seeing why he was snooping? I know you're not on the telephone, but would you like one of us to try and find a policeman - or a telephone box?"

"Oh no, my boy. Wouldn't do any good. We're isolated here and the stranger might have been a holiday maker who lost his way and then lost his head by throwing stones. Some people are scared of dogs."

"And of girls too, by the look of it," David said indignantly. "I wish Mackie had caught him."

"I think he caught him this afternoon," Penny said. "We'll tell you why we think so presently, Major, but I believe it was the same man who stopped outside your gate in the car and flashed his torch on us so rudely. We think we know who this man is, but will you tell us first whether you've had any other replies to your advertisement?"

"Or if anybody else has been interested in your house or tried to get you out of it?" Jon asked.

The Major passed Penny his empty cup and looked long into the flickering flames of the fire before he answered.

"I'm sorry. Deeply sorry that this should have happened to Mary tonight. I must tell you all now, that this afternoon before you arrived, I was visited by a house agent. I did not care for him but he told me that he had a client willing and anxious to buy Amorys immediately. It was a good offer. He was pressing, and it seemed to me that the unknown client was in a hurry to get in here."

"Do you really want to sell? Would it help you if we went back to Rye tomorrow?" Penny asked.

"I do not want to sell this house and I am determined to live here for the rest of my life. But it is expensive to keep going, and that is the reason why I thought that an advertisement----"

He got up and stood in front of the fire, gazing down on them: the twins sat side by side looking ridiculously alike; Jonathan fair-haired and bespectacled was next to Penny; and David, sturdy, good-looking and grim, was staring up at him challengingly.

"Remarkable that you should all be here tonight like this," the old man went on. "Yesterday morning I didn't know you existed. Why do you think people are suddenly so interested in this house? That unpleasant young man with the beard yesterday, the man in the car tonight, and the stranger who was watching us through the window just now?"

"I'll say what I think," Jon said in his deliberate way. "We haven't told you yet, sir, that the chap with the sandy whiskers is staying at the Smuggler's Rest. We had trouble with him this afternoon on our way here. He recognized us and tried to persuade us not to come here. Penny told you just now that we think this chap is determined to get in here. Perhaps he knows something that you don't, sir? You won't think that we're impertinent if we ask you a straight question, will you?"

"No, Jonathan. What do you want to know?"

"Have you any reason to believe that there are Roman remains or any sort of valuable treasure hidden on your land here? I think this chap at the pub is sure that there *is* something here and he could well be the mysterious client who has made you an offer for the house."

"I suppose he could. I hadn't thought of that."

"And another thing, sir. Can you remember seeing him before yesterday when we were here?"

"I am not sure, my boy. I'm often forgetful. Occasionally people call to ask the way or whether I serve teas or have eggs to sell. Sometimes I do sell eggs. It *is* possible that this unpleasant young man called here before."

"And I suppose that anybody could get into your field without you knowing?" Jonathan persisted.

Penny was watching the old man, and as he now covered his eyes with his hand she was suddenly sorry for him. She knew Jon in this mood and knew that she could not stop him asking the Major any more questions.

"Anybody could get through that wire fence," Jon went on. "I suppose they could climb up the sides of that little quarry and come through the spinney up into the orchard at night and you wouldn't be any wiser, would you?"

"Of course he wouldn't," Penny interrupted. "Neither would you if you were asleep in the house. What are you trying to prove, Jon," and she glared at him so furiously that he had the grace to look abashed.

"But treasure, Mister Major?" Mary said. "Treasure is the thing - do you think you've got any at Amorys? We're good at treasure and if there's any about we'd like to find it for you. That's what Jonathan means."

"Extraordinary situation. Remarkable," the Major said as he got up and paced the hearthrug. "Couldn't have believed I would be discussing such a subject with you all. Truth is I don't know whether there is anything to be found here. Told you yesterday about the Roman altar in the church. There have been things found on Oxney of course, but I've never discovered

anything. Not really interested before. Wife and I lived selfish lives here, I'm afraid. Just ourselves. She loved this place. You really think there might be something here?"

"I do," Jon said. "I can't believe that bearded type would want to get in here unless there's something to be found. He must have some sort of clue."

"Do you mind if we search?" David said.

"Look and welcome, my boy. I'd rather find something, even if it had to be declared treasure trove, and go on living here than sell out and leave a treasure for somebody else. If there is a treasure to be found, its discovery will be something for you all to do while you are here. Specially Richard and Mary, of course."

An awkward silence followed this speech because they could not be sure if he was serious. It was possible that he was saying all this just because he thought that treasure hunting might amuse them. Penny, in particular, believed that he was thinking of something else even while he was talking. For the first time since they had met she was uncertain about him.

"You said yesterday that Amorys was haunted, Major. Did you mean it?"

Jon looked at her warningly as the Major replied, "All depends what you mean by haunted, my dear. I think it's a house with a long history and a long memory. It might well have something to tell some people. My wife said it was haunted, but she was more sensitive to that sort of thing than I am. I do not think she was ever *frightened* by anything she saw or heard. Why do you ask, Penelope?"

"I wanted to know what you thought, or whether you had ever seen or heard anything unusual in the house or grounds. I'm sure it is haunted. This place, as you said, is full of the past, and I had a rather horrid dream out in the copse yesterday when the thunderstorm broke. I told Jon about it and I'll tell you all now. At first I saw Roman soldiers landing on a shingly beach. They were singing a marching song and they walked right past without seeing me. Leading them was a wonderful, stern centurion in armour with a great plume on his helmet. It wasn't like an ordinary dream because I was really

there. There was a procession of men in white robes and then I was in an underground place with a fire by a sort of altar. Men with the heads of creatures - hideous creatures which terrified me - were in this place. There was a carving on the wall that showed a young man killing a bull..." Her voice died away as she covered her face with her hands. The twins were looking at her in astonishment while Jon, who had heard this story last night, said, "No need to go into all that again, Penny. Try and forget it."

David got up and tried to change the subject. "It's getting late and we ought to wash up. Horrible thought I know after such a splendid evening... It was the thunder made you dream, Penny - unless you had radishes or something indigestible for your lunch. Don't worry about it, Penny. Let's shove everything into the sink and then you can take us down to the haunted wood and we'll scare the ghosts away."

Jon glared at him but Penny managed a smile.

"You can laugh, David, but I can see the flickering light of the torches in that underground temple place and those figures with horrible heads now, if I close my eyes. You believe me don't you, Major? Have you ever had a dream like that here, at Amorys?"

He did not laugh at her and as she got up he put a hand on her shoulder. "No, my dear, I haven't and of course I believe your dream although I don't know what it meant. Perhaps I should know... Goodnight to you all, and thank you for the happiest evening I can remember for a long time. I trust you will all sleep well - with happy dreams."

"Well!" said Mary when he had closed the door. "What a peculiar sort of evening. It was a lovely banquet really, but it doesn't seem as cheerful now. Let's not wash up but go out and explore the grounds and see if there are any spies about."

"There were some things that nice old man didn't want to talk about," Dickie remarked. "We've met several peculiar people today, so perhaps we're going to have another adventure."



Then they called Macbeth and went out together in the moonlight. Penny was annoyed with David for trying to be funny about her dream, and so she did not answer when he said that he was sure that the Major knew more about Roman remains and treasure than he pretended. But Jon was not so reticent.

"I can't understand your mood, David. If you don't like it here I suggest that we go back to Rye tomorrow. We all wish that Peter was here too, but I'm quite sure that Ginger Whiskers knows there's something valuable to be found in these grounds. None of us likes him and we've really promised to stay here and look after the old Major. It's my belief that they are trying to get him off the premises. You don't really suggest that we leave him alone now, do you?"

"Not really. I know you two will hate me for it, but I'm sure he's hiding something from us and I don't altogether trust him. But I'm sorry I doubted your dream, Penny. Forgive me. Maybe I'm in the wrong mood."

Penny slipped between the two boys and linked her arms with theirs while the twins ran ahead through the orchard with Mackie at their heels. The long grass was already wet with dew and the coppice in front of them looked like a black wall without a door. The night was clear and still but for the almost unceasing drone of planes crossing the Channel. At the edge of the wood the twins waited, while Macbeth seemed unusually reluctant to go forward alone.

"Ought to have brought a torch," Jon said. "We haven't been here before in the dark, but there's a way in and Penny and I will go first. Single file and don't try to leave the track. It's not far and the view is worth seeing when we get through."

He soon found the entrance and Penny, who was hating this expedition, took his hand as they plunged into the darkness. The wood closed round them and even the twins had nothing to say except "Ow!" or "Ooh!" as the brambles clutched at their clothes and scratched their legs. When, after a few minutes, Jon led them on to the little plateau above the quarry, Mackie was already looking over the edge wagging his tail with excitement but neither barking with defiance or warning.

"This is where I had my dream," Penny whispered. "When the thunder woke me Jon wasn't there. He'd gone into the wood. I was terrified."

"So would I have been," Mary said loyally. "It's a ghostly wood but there is a lovely place for a camp. Dickie an' me would keep guard here if you like."

Jon pointed out the road some two hundred yards below them and the long line of lime trees along the banks of the canal. The flat Marsh was bathed in silver moonlight while above the dykes and ditches there hung a faint miasma of mist. Far away to their right they could see the twinkle of the lights of Rye.

"No wonder the old man doesn't want to leave this place," David admitted. "This is quite a view. But there's nothing to stop anyone trespassing here, is there? I mean they could get into the bottom of the field at the road and walk straight up here. How deep is this little quarry?"

He pushed between the gorse bushes and looked over the edge but there was not much to see. Just a slope of rubble about eight feet deep and then a wilderness of weeds which seemed to thin out into a field of rough pasture.

"And very easy for anyone to hide down there or in the wood," Jon said. "But what on earth could be found here?"

"Something *under* the earth, p'raps," Dickie volunteered. "We'll look round tomorrow. What we want is one of those electric machines that can find buried treasure. Simple really. I wonder why nobody has done it."

"P'raps they have, you idiot," Mary laughed. "Anyway there can be nobody hiding round here now or Mackie would have hunted him out. Let's go back now. It will all look different in the morning."

There was no sign of the Major when they got back to the house and as they were all tired they went straight upstairs to bed. All, that is, except Jon and Penny who lingered for a moment in the hall.

"You're not liking this expedition much, are you?" Jon whispered as he took her hands. "You're shivering. What's wrong?"

For a brief moment she leaned forward and rested her cheek against his jacket.

"I don't know, Jon. I don't know. This place seems to be busy with ghosts. I've never felt like this before."

"You're still fretting about that nightmare," he said. "Try to forget it. We've come here to have some fun. Mary was right. Everything will seem different tomorrow."

She shook her head. "You're like David," she whispered. "I thought you'd understand but you don't believe me either," and she turned and ran upstairs to the beautiful bedroom which was kept as it had been when Mrs. Bolshaw was alive. Mary was leaning on the sill of the open windows and looking out over the coppice to the Marsh. She did not turn as Penny came in and stood behind her.

"It's lovely to see you again, Penny," she whispered. "I know you and Jon think that Dickie an' me are very silly and babyish sometimes but we're not really. We wish we saw you more often - an' I wish you were happier this very minute. You haven't had a silly sort of row with Jon, have you?"

Penny was crying now but she did not care. She put her arms round Mary and hugged her.

"Of course I haven't, Mary. Sometimes boys are very dense and don't understand. Get undressed and go to bed and we'll all have a wonderful day tomorrow."

"I believe you about those Romans," Mary said. "About your dream, I mean. I have nightmares that I can't forget sometimes and twice Dickie had the same dream as I did. Some people would say it's soppy but it just shows that they don't know."

"What's soppy?" Penny laughed shakily. "What do you mean, you funny little twin?"

"You don't give me time to finish. Some people think it's soppy to say your prayers but I don't. Specially if you're frightened. An' people who say they're never scared are liars. An' another thing. Would you like Mackie to sleep on your bed? He's on mine already but he loves you and he'll guard you if you like."

Penny was so touched by this offer that she found it difficult to answer. She suddenly realized how lucky she was to hold the affection and friendship of these Morton twins who, although so often infuriating, had qualities which made some grown-ups seem unworthy of respect.

"No, thank you Mary. Mackie must stay on your bed. But keep the door of your little room open and then I can call you if I have another horrible dream. And Mary. I'll say my prayers too."

She did, and was asleep almost as soon as her head touched the pillow and she had called "Goodnight" to Mary. Later, how much later she did not know, she woke suddenly. Her room was full of moonlight. She realized that her sleep must have been deep and dreamless because the bedclothes were undisturbed, and as she raised her head she felt a gentle breeze from the open window and heard the faint movement of a rose against the pane. But something else had wakened her, and as she strained her ears she could hear Mary's even breathing from the next room.

She was wide awake now and sat up in bed. And then she knew what had wakened her - the clink of metal on stone. The night was so still that the sound carried clearly. Metal on stone. With wildly-beating heart she slipped out of bed and ran to the open window. In the blackness of the wood she saw a flickering light between the trees. Was this her dream coming true? She remembered the procession of men in white robes, the soldiers with their spears and round helmets, the centurion with his armoured breastplate and huge helmet with its plume of horse-hair. She remembered too the horrible figures with their heads of grotesque birds and beasts and even more terrifying blank faces. The light moved again and in sudden panic Penny ran into Mary's room, grabbed her by the shoulder and cried:

"The Romans, Mary! In the coppice with torches. Come and see them for yourself."

## 6. Lights in the Night

"Come and see for yourself, Mary. Roman soldiers in the wood. I saw the light of torches. I heard the clink of armour. *Please* come, Mary. Hurry!"

Macbeth growled and jumped from his mistress's bed, while Mary tried to shake off the hand clutching her shoulder.

"Please, Mary. Do wake up and tell me that you can see and hear them too. It's not a dream this time. It's real. I saw the light and I want you to see it."

Mary sat up and stifled a yawn.

"It's you, Penny. I was asleep. Tell me again. I thought you said something about Roman soldiers."

Penny told her again and Mary dragged herself out of bed. Macbeth was whining by the door, but she scooped him up in her arms and joined Penny by the open window. All was quiet. The moon rode high bathing the orchard in its cold, white light and throwing grotesque shadows from the twisted boughs of the apple trees. The line of the wood stood out in black contrast - silent and sinister and without the glimmer of a light. Beyond the treetops was the Marsh, and beyond the Marsh, although they could not see it, was the same sea which the Romans crossed two thousand years ago. A breeze brought them the smell of the sea and the green levels and it stirred the rose that tapped the window pane. But that was all except for the chattering of Mary's teeth.

"But I *did* see a light in the wood, Mary. I woke up suddenly and knew that something had happened. You know what I mean, don't you? Keep very, very still and p'raps it will come again. And listen, too. Listen for a faint, clinking noise."

She put her arm round Mary's shoulder. Macbeth with his paws on the window sill whined again but all was quiet in the orchard and the wood beyond. After a long minute Mary whispered:

"There isn't a light, Penny, and I can't hear anything either. Are you quite, quite sure that you weren't sort of dreaming an' got out of bed in your sleep .. ? It isn't that I don't believe you, but there isn't anything different now, is there?"

"No Mary, there isn't. But there was, and I wasn't walking in my sleep. I know how real my dream was, but I know that what I saw and heard from this window was real too. *There was somebody there, Mary.* I'm certain. And whatever it was woke me up. If we're patient and quiet perhaps we shall see it again. There's somebody or something in that wood."

"All right, Penny. I believe you. Shall we wake the boys then go down and see? I don't believe Mackie thinks there's anybody there."

Macbeth, shivering in her arms, licked her nose. His ears were cocked and he knew that he was on guard and he would certainly have heard any sound from the wood before the girls. Mary put him down and he trotted over to the door and sat on the mat with his head on one side.

"Shall we wake the boys then?" Mary persisted. "I don't mind going out there with Mackie to guard us, but p'raps we ought to tell the old Major too. It's his wood after all."

"I don't think I want to tell the boys, Mary. David didn't believe my dream meant anything. He said I must have been eating radishes, and if there isn't anybody there *now*, I'm not very keen on giving David the chance of saying that I had Welsh rarebit for supper."

"But Jon would believe you, Penny. Of course he would. He'd believe you whatever David said, and anyway I don't think you're fair to David who was only teasing you. Just remember how brutal he is to us twins sometimes and then you'll see that you've nothing to worry about. I think we'd better tell them and go down to the wood right away to find your Romans. Better tell them than the Major, I s'pose."

Penny agreed. "We mustn't disturb him. But I don't want to wake the boys either. Let's wait and watch from here for a little longer. I'm sure I didn't imagine those lights."

Before Mary could answer there came a gentle tapping on the door and Mackie, with his tail wagging, whined as if he knew who was outside. Penny ran across, opened the door a crack and whispered, "Who is it?"

"Me," said Dickie. "Let me in for Pete's sake. What's happened?"

Penny noticed that he said "happened" and not "happening". She noticed, too, that he looked anxiously at his twin as if to make sure nothing had happened to her. It was not possible for Dickie to have seen the light in the wood from the front of the house and neither could he have heard that faint clink of metal on stone or their whispering. She closed the door as he walked across the room, and sat down on her bed. His hair was tousled from sleep but he was wide awake.

"What's up?" he said again. "What are you two girls fussing about?"

"Don't make such a row," Mary whispered. "How did you know?"

"You know," Dickie replied. "I can't explain. I just woke up suddenly and thought about you and wanted to know what was worrying you. Those two big hogs in there wouldn't have heard a bomb, so I just came along here and listened outside the door. I heard you two nattering and whispering and I wondered what was to do. You O.K. twin?"

"Yes Dickie, thank you. When I was looking out of the window with Penny I was thinking about you too. Come over here now and look out with us. See if you can see what Penny saw before she woke me."

Dickie padded across to the open window where Macbeth tried to lick his toes. Penny then told him what she had seen.

"And don't ask me if I was dreaming again, *please*," she went on. "I was *not* dreaming. The noise must have wakened me and when I saw a light flickering in the trees I was scared and woke Mary. It sounds silly now, I s'pose, but I shall never forget my dream and I thought perhaps it was the Roman soldiers."

"More likely old Ginger Whiskers Dogkicker," Dickie said practically. "Do you think she's being silly, Mary?"

"No, I don't. You remember *Puck of Pook's Hill* don't you, twin? Of course you do. All this round here is Puck's country of 'oak, ash and thorn', which always made a magic for Puck and the children. They saw Roman soldiers marching and so did Penny in her dream. Maybe Penny saw one now in the wood. The old Major said this place was haunted and Penny thinks it is, so it might well be. P'raps there are ghosts down there in that horrible little dark brambly wood."

"So what?" said Dickie firmly. "S'pose it's haunted and the light in the wood isn't Dogkicker? Or is Dogkicker if you know what I mean? What do we do? Go to bed? Wake up the others? Ring the alarm bell at the castle gate? Ask the old Major if he's got a gun or go down to the kitchen and get a little tasty something to eat because I'm getting hungry? What to do?"

Mary giggled. Sometimes her twin was funny.

"Penny doesn't want to wake up David and Jon because she believes they'll say she imagined it. I say we three and darling Mackie, who is the most super guard dog in the world, should creep out of the house and see if there is anybody there. I'm brave enough if you are. Mackie will protect us. Shall we go?"

"Of course," Penny agreed. "But first we'll all put on slacks and sweaters. Please don't wake the boys, Dickie as I don't want them to know. Be as quick and quiet as you can and we'll wait for you in the kitchen. Thanks for coming Dickie. We're glad you did."

Dickie, with one hand clutching his pyjamas, almost as if he was reaching for a gun, swaggered like a bow-legged cowboy over to the door.

"O.K., sister. O.K.," he drawled out of the side of his mouth. "Will be right along. No talkin' and no gossipin'... An' bring along the old bloodhound."

Five minutes later they slipped out of the back door into the moonlight. Mary was carrying Macbeth in case he dashed ahead and gave the alarm



and Penny was now sure that she had been a fool not to call Jon and David. This was a mad thing to do and stupid of her to involve the twins. Just suppose that man was hiding in the wood and watching them this very minute. He would be able to see them in the moonlight although he was invisible to them. Suppose it was Ginger Whiskers, who had good reason to hate them and had already shown that he had no scruples by throwing stones at Macbeth and Mary. How could she now persuade the twins to go back to the house and keep out of trouble? Only perhaps by asking Dickie to go back and fetch the boys. And a fine fool she'd look then without the courage to finish the job she'd started.

"We're standing right in the moonlight," Dickie whispered. "Just s'pose old Dogkicker is in the wood waiting by a pile of stones. Why don't we get into the dark under the trees?"

Penny nodded, uncomfortably aware that Dickie seemed able to read her thoughts. They moved into the shadows and Mary whispered, "Mackie is getting too heavy for me. Shall I let him down and see what happens? If there's anybody in the wood Mackie will find him. I don't know what he would do if it's a ghost. I don't really think he knows about ghosts."

Penny whispered that she would carry him and hoisted the dog up under one arm. His ears were cocked, and he was trembling. He knew that something was expected of him.

"Do you think we ought to call the boys before we go any farther?" she ventured, but was put to shame by Dickie who replied, "Certainly not. I'm absolutely scared stiff but I'm certainly not going to show Jon and David that I am. An' another thing. If I go back into the house I don't suppose I'll ever be brave enough to come out again - and although it isn't that I don't *believe* you, Penny, it just might be that there isn't anybody in the wood. Mackie isn't sure, you know, an' if we make certain that there isn't anyone there then we've been jolly brave to find out."

"And that will be the time to waken the others to tell them what we've done and how brave we've been. Let Mackie go now, Penny. If there's anybody there he'll find them," Mary said.

As Penny stooped to put the dog down she heard Dickie draw in his breath sharply with surprise.

"I saw a light. I really did. There it is again. Deep in the wood. Just a flicker but it was a moving light... There! Look where my finger is pointing... Now it's gone. Did you see it, Mary?"

"I'm so *very* sorry Dickie, but I didn't. But Mackie will. After him, Mackie! Good boy. Seek him out."

Macbeth was off in a flash with one sharp, triumphant bark and soon disappeared in the long orchard grass. As he did so Penny lost her fears. Perhaps it was only the unknown and the dream and all the talk of ghosts that had scared her so? How could it have been Romans? What a fool she had been. If the intruder was really Ginger Whiskers and they could actually see him trespassing, then tomorrow they would persuade the Major to report him to the police.

Mackie did not bark again and Penny could not catch him as she raced ahead of the twins towards the wood. She saw no other gleam of light between the trees, and perhaps because she ran so fast she heard no more mysterious sounds of metal on stone. Suddenly the blank wall of the wood was before her - so dark in the shadows that she could not even see the narrow entrance to the track. She stood still for a moment waiting for the twins, wondering where Macbeth had gone. Dickie reached her first and she put her hand over his mouth in warning.

"Just *listen*," Penny breathed as Mary arrived and grabbed her hand. "Don't make a sound. Listen for Mackie and for footsteps."

They listened. An owl drifted overhead. A little breeze stirred the treetops and then, very faintly, they heard the sound of a scuffling in the undergrowth.

Mary reached up and pulled Penny's head down to her mouth. "I think that's Mackie. If there was anyone in there he'd bark to tell us. He's hunting. Shall we call him?"

"No. Leave him alone. I'm going through to that little camping place. We shall be able to see the road from there, and if it is Ginger Whiskers I'm not afraid of him now anyway. You two stay here because three of us may make too much noise. All I want to do is to see who's prowling about round here. Mackie will protect me."

"You're mad," Dickie said. "Honestly you're crazy, Penny. First of all you make our blood run cold about ghosts, then you won't call the others so that we could really go into the attack. Now you say you're going in there by yourself. Since you got me out of bed with your muttering and whispering I'm not jolly well going back again until I've done something violent - particularly if it's old Dogkicker."

"And we didn't bring torches either," Mary said. "Yes, Dickie is right. Of course you're not going in there alone. Lead the way, Penny, and if Mackie doesn't find anybody and we don't see anybody we'll go back to bed just as quickly as we can."

Penny nodded and searched along the edge of the wood for the entrance. Eventually she found a way in, but it was a few minutes before she realized that it was not the main track but a half hidden opening much farther to the right. Branches of hazels swung back and hit them, brambles clutched at their slacks and tangles of invisible trailing plants clung to their ankles. It was too dark to see anything except a faint gleam of moonlight far ahead, and in a sort of frenzy Penny realized at last that this expedition was one of the most stupid, headstrong things she had ever done.

She struggled ahead for she dare not turn back. They were making a lot of noise now. Mary cried out in pain as a bramble tore her cheek while Dickie, in a rage, was mumbling all the most wicked words he knew. Then suddenly, only a few yards ahead of them, Macbeth began to bark and Penny, struggling forward, thought that just for a brief moment she saw a tall, thin shadowy shape which was not a tree. All her fears had left her now. She had forgotten ghosts and the faceless, robed figures of her horrid dream. Her red hair was beginning to mean something, and she was determined to discover the identity of this intruder if she could. Macbeth was now in full cry, and above the noise of her own progress and the twins'

furious struggles behind her she could hear a scrambling noise and then again the clink of metal.

Now she could see moonlight ahead and knew by the sound of Mackie's barking that he was out of the wood. Suddenly the bark changed to a startled yelp and she heard the rattling of stones. Mary shouted something behind her which she did not hear and then the ground gave way under her feet. With a cry of fear Penny clutched in vain at some overhanging branches as she rolled down a stony slope into a bed of nettles. Instinctively she covered her face and head with her arms, but something struck her elbow a violent blow and for a few moments she was stunned by her fall. The first thing she heard was the voice of Mary coming from somewhere above her.

"Penny! Penny darling. Where are you? What's happened?"

Penny opened her eyes and moved her head. A nettle stung her on the cheek and she realized that she had run out of a different part of the wood and over the edge of the little quarry. She tried to sit up and cried out with the pain in her elbow. "Be careful, twins," she called. "I've fallen over the edge of the pit, but I think I'm O.K. Can you see across the road from there?"

"No. Can't see anything much," Dickie replied. "We've come out on the wrong side of the wood. That camping place must be in the middle. Sure you're not hurt and where's Mackie?"

Carefully Penny got to her feet, stepped out of the nettles and looked up to see the twins peering at her between some bushes.

"Can you get along the edge of the pit to that little clearing? Try, twins, because from there you ought to be able to see the road and the bottom of the Major's field. Hurry, though. I'm all right and I'll get along to you from down here."

"But Mackie?" Mary wailed. "Where is he? We must find him."

"I'll find him," Penny promised. "He's somewhere around, but please try to see the road. I'll follow you."

There was no sense in keeping quiet now because they had made enough noise to warn any intruder, so she whistled and called to Macbeth as the twins cautiously made their way towards the gorse bushes fringing the edge of the pit. Penny could see them in the moonlight above her as she began to struggle through nettles and brambles in the dark.

Then Mary began to call Macbeth and soon Penny heard him scuffling towards her through the undergrowth and whining with joy at being united again with his loved ones. She stooped to pat him but as she touched his head he yelped and she realized that he was hurt. Mary heard him too and called out in anguish. "Is he wounded, Penny? Has he been attacked by that foul Dogkicker?" And with that she missed her footing, tumbled over the edge and came rolling down the stony slope.

She did not seem to be hurt and was far more concerned about Mackie than herself, although it was too dark to see any wounds on either of them. Penny realized that none of them had been very clever. Whoever had been in the wood had now certainly escaped while first the dog and then the two of them had fallen over the edge of the pit.

"You all right, Dickie?" she called softly. "Don't *you* fall over. We'll try and find a way up. Can you see the road?"

"Shut up!" Dickie hissed. "Shut up, you girls. I can see the chap. He's got a helmet on and he's riding a bike towards Rye. He isn't a ghost I'm sure."

"Stay there, Dickie. We'll try and climb up to you. We can't catch him now."

Macbeth seemed to have lost some of his spirit for he whimpered a little and kept close to the girls as Penny, near to tears of anger against the nettles and brambles and the pain of scratches and bruises, pushed her way up the slope towards Dickie who was standing between the gorse bushes above them.

Suddenly her foot touched something on the ground - metal that clinked against a loose stone - and she stooped to pick up a small pickaxe with a wooden handle. Mary made the next find only a few feet away. This was an

electric lantern of the sort that can be carried by a handle and which throws a long beam. The glass and the bulb were both broken.

"That chap has disappeared now," Dickie said. "Why don't you both come up instead of messing about down there? It's an extraordinary thing but I'm hungry."

"It isn't extraordinary," Penny snapped. "It's normal for you. You're a greedy little boy and if you've got any sense at all you'd help us up instead of talking about food. Anybody would think that you hadn't fancied anything at our banquet and deliberately starved yourself."

"You're grumpy and unfair," Mary said behind her. "Dickie would have come down here with us if you hadn't asked him to stay up there where he has made a vital discovery. We're surprised at you, Penny. We thought you were our friend."

"I'm not friends with anybody until I've got out of this place. This is just about the silliest thing we've ever done. Put Mackie down, Mary, and see if he can find a way up. Call him to you, Dickie."

Dickie obeyed, and after nosing about rather halfheartedly Macbeth found a narrow sheep track which led the girls out of the pit. Penny passed up the pick and smashed lantern to Dickie and then gave Mary a hand as they scrambled up into the moonlight.

"You both look a bit rough," Dickie greeted them, tactlessly. "And so does Mackie. I vote we go back to the house and have something to eat."

"Show us first where you saw the chap on the bike," Penny insisted. "Did you recognize him? Was it Ginger Whiskers? What did you mean about a helmet?"

Dickie pointed down to the moonlit road.

"Of course I don't know who it was, except that it wasn't old Dogkicker. He was very mysterious. Tall, thin and wearing a round helmet. I couldn't see

any weapons. He was just riding his bike quite slowly along there towards Rye. I'm wondering why Mackie didn't chase him."

"I think he was the first to fall over the edge of the pit," Penny said. "I'm sure he was stunned but he doesn't seem to be badly hurt. Sorry I was cross just now but we've rather messed it up. Maybe we ought to have called the boys, and I think we ought to go back now and tell them. I s'pose we ought to tell the Major too that somebody in a helmet has been trespassing in his grounds. What a night! I think I can find the shortest way back through the wood from here. I'll go first."

"Nobody asks about me," Mary complained bitterly. "I plunged almost to my death to rescue Mackie but nobody cares. Not even my twin," and this signified that she was feeling better.

On the way back to the house Macbeth also recovered some of his spirits but he stayed close to his mistress and they both limped along. Eventually they reached the back door and Penny led the way into the kitchen. She switched on the light and put the short-handled pick and the broken lantern on the table. Then they looked at each other and Mary began to giggle.

"You look as if you've been in a battle, Penny," she whispered. "And I feel as if I have. I suggest Dickie goes to fetch the boys and we put the kettle on and have a cup of tea. Poor little darling Mackie is going to have some milk because he's suffered more than any of us... Go on, twin, you didn't plunge over the abyss so you're fit enough to fetch the two masterminds. But don't you *dare* to tell them anything."

"And don't wake the old man," Penny warned. "We must tell Jon and David first."

Dickie nodded and went out. Penny plugged in the kettle and found some cups while Mary crooned over Macbeth as he gobbled up some milk. It was five minutes before the boys appeared, tousled, yawning and very bad-tempered.

"What's all this fuss?" David began and then, after a good look at the girls, blinked in the bright light and went on, "What have you been doing?"

Fighting each other?"

Jon went over to Penny who was making the tea. "What have you been up to you little idiot? You're scratched and you might be going to have a black eye. Are you all right?"

She poured the tea. "Somebody will have to wake the Major and tell him what we've seen, but there's no hurry now for a few minutes. Please don't interrupt and I'll tell you what happened."

Penny told Jon and David about the strange sound that had woken her, the discoveries she and the twins had made in the coppice and of the tall man in a helmet riding off on his bicycle towards Rye. "I am sure," she continued, "that man had been searching the wood and the grounds. Dickie is sure that he's not the Dogkicker but of course he has no idea who he really is. Somebody had better tell the Major at once. There's nothing to argue about, David. I've told you what has happened, but we can't wait until the morning to tell the old man. This time he might want somebody to telephone the police. Who's going to tell him?"

"I will," said Jon. "But we might as well all go up. You'll have to tell him your story all over again. Come on."

They trooped wearily upstairs with Macbeth. They tiptoed unnecessarily along the corridor and Jon knocked firmly on the door of the room into which none of them had been. There was no reply.

"Louder," Penny whispered. "I think he's deaf."

Jon knocked again. Silence within. Penny put her ear to the door but could hear nothing - not even a gentle snore. They looked at each other in surprise and fear.

"He went up before any of us, didn't he?" David whispered. "Anyone see him go?"

Nobody had and Penny felt a horrid, cold trickle of foreboding creep up her spine. She was tired and sore and now she was afraid. Beside her Mary



suddenly gripped her hand for comfort. Her fingers were cold and Penny could feel her trembling.

She raised her free hand and banged her clenched fist on the door. Again and again, but there was still no reply.

"Try the door, Jon," David said.

Jon turned the handle and the door opened with a squeak. The room was dark and they could see nothing.

"Are you there, sir?" Jon called. "Answer us, please. Are you there, Major?"

No sound but the steady ticking of a clock.

David reached over Jon's shoulder and switched on the light. They saw a big room, sparsely furnished. Beside the curtained window was a single bed. It was empty, tidy, and had not been slept in.

A long silence was broken by Mary who pushed past the boys and pointed to an envelope standing against the clock on the mantelpiece. David walked across the room and picked it up.

"It's addressed to you, Jon," he said as he passed it over.

## 7. The Well-digger's Tale

Next morning at the Smuggler's Rest, Les and Valerie were waiting impatiently for breakfast. Their meals were served by Mrs. Crump at irregular hours at a table set between the windows of the upstairs sitting room. It had not taken Mrs. Crump long to realize that Les and Valerie, whatever they paid, were unwelcome guests. She did not like them. She did not like her father-in-law, Granpa, she hated the Smuggler's Rest and she detested hard work. Indeed the only joy of her life was her son George whom nobody else seemed to like.

She had not wanted to take Les and Valerie but was forced to do so because Granpa insisted, and what little money there was in this establishment belonged to Granpa. Now she did not even try to hide her dislike of the unpleasant, sulky couple who had been wished on her.

So Les and Valerie, who expected breakfast to be served at nine, were not in a very good humour when it arrived at twenty minutes past.

"Nice mornin'," Elsie Crump said, as if she hated the sight of it, and as she banged a tray down on the table, "Poached eggs for two and I got you some cornflakes because you fussed so yesterday and I hope you'll have nothin' to complain about today - that'll be a nice change."

"Charming woman," Les said as the door banged behind her. "I can hardly wait to see her again."

"And I hope I never see another poached egg like this again," Valerie said. "I can't stand poached eggs on soggy, half-cooked toast and everything this woman brings up to us looks dirty. If you're set on going on with this silly idea of Roman treasure, Les, you'd better find us somewhere else to stay. This place is the end and has been the end for years. I've had enough and you can eat my egg as well as your own. Or throw it out of the window. If I touch mine I shall be sick. Do you still want to go ahead with this ridiculous search?"

Les reached for her plate.

"Of course I do. I'm going to get into Amorys somehow and the best way will probably be to trick those kids and the old man out of it. You're supposed to have your wits about you. You say you've met those kids before, so why can't you think of some way of shifting them?... Look here, Val. I'm doing all this for you - for us - and you don't seem to realize it. You know how badly we want money. We want to get married, don't we? We've been all over this time and time again and I can't understand why you want to back out. What's wrong?"

Valerie finished her second cup of tea and lit a cigarette.

"I told you yesterday. I don't believe this is the way to make easy money. It's too much of a gamble. You're just crazy about this Roman business; if you knew something was there it would be different. Anyway I'm not going to get mixed up with those youngsters at Amorys. They would remember me as easily as I recognized them, and I tell you that if they do realize who I am we've had it."

"Very well," Les snapped. "I'm going ahead with this job - on my own if I have to. Seems to me the best thing you can do is to get back to London and put some pressure on that fat old Aunt Em of yours and persuade her to raise enough money to buy Amorys before somebody else gets after it."

He got up and looked out of the window as a van stopped outside.

"Here's the post now. I'll go down and see if there's anything for us before that hag goes through it."

He was back in two minutes and threw an envelope on her plate.

"Just in time. She was looking at it. London postmark. Who's it from?"

Valerie looked up in surprise.

"Aunt Em, I think. I'll tell you if there's anything interesting in it."

Les moved over to the window and nibbled a nail. He was wondering whether he would be better off without Valerie and her aunt, although he needed help to get into Amorys. He looked back and saw that Valerie was frowning and this suggested that Emma Cartwright was not going to help. He was right.

"Sorry, Les, but she said she can't raise the money and dare not approach anybody else. I really am sorry because I was fairly sure that she'd got some tucked away somewhere. And the trouble is she doesn't really believe in this idea of Roman treasure being hidden round here. She doesn't think that it's worth your trouble - or ours too for that matter."

Les turned and cursed her. He accused her of breaking her word, of cowardice, of not caring about him, of being scared of a pack of children and finally of tricking him by suggesting that Emma Cartwright would be able to find the money. He paused for breath and Valerie, white-faced, stood up to face him when the door opened quietly and Master George Crump sidled into the room. Although he did not look directly at either of them, they knew by the smirk on his face that he must have heard at least something of Les's outburst. Gently he pushed the door back and they heard the latch click.

"Get out and stay out," Les ordered through clenched teeth, but George stayed where he was and just shook his head.

"Yer doan't want to talk to me like that. Yer shouldn't do it. And yer shouldn't shout loud in this place. It's old and people can hear you. Honestly they can. My Granpa could have heard yer yelling so I just comes up to warn yer to be careful. Friendly like. But business too mind yer. I'm not above doing a bit of business now that I've been on the telly... *You stay where yer are, mate, and doan't threaten me. I knows too much about yer.*"

The last few words were spoken with such venom that Les, who was about to fall upon George and throw him out, stepped back with a horrid grimace and whispered, "What do you want?"

George licked his lips.

"If yer wasn't so hasty yer'd see I was wanting to help yer. I knows something yer wants to know. Do yer know where my Granpa went last night? Do yer?"

Half-hypnotized by this unpleasant boy Les could do nothing but nod agreement. He certainly wanted to know where Granpa was last night.

"I sin 'im," George smirked. "I sin 'im. He went out late on his old bike with a liddle pickaxe and 'is big electric light. I reckon 'e was out diggin' somewhere but I dunno when 'e come back."

Here George advanced a few steps until he was standing in the centre of the room.

"What I says is true. Maybe I could find out where 'e went and if yer likes to make it worth me while I could help yer, Mister. I knows what you're looking for, Mister. I could help yer. I could start now. Gimme ten bob and I'll bike over to Amorys and see what's to do over there. I reckon you'd loike to know about that. I knows my way around that place. I knows where I've found my Roman things... Ten bob is dirt cheap I reckon."

Les looked with loathing at the boy who gazed back at him stolidly. Then Valerie said:

"That's very interesting, George. I told you yesterday that I was sure you'd be able to help us while you were staying here. And what do you think you're going to discover at Amorys? That your Granpa went there to dig last night? Is that it?"

"I didn't say no such thing, Miss, but I reckon you'd both like to know where the old man went lars night."

"We might," Valerie agreed. "But what about Amorys?"

"I knows that you wants to get into Amorys. I knows a lot about that old place. I was thinkin' that you'd like to know what's going on there. Whether those kids are still there f'rinstance? Or if they're going out? Or whether

somebody could get that old crackpot Major out of the way for a bit?... See what I mean?"

"Yes, George. We do see. You're a nice, willing, helpful chap and you may certainly go to Amorys and look round. Come back quickly and let us know what you saw."

"O.K. then. Hand over ten bob. No fooling. Cash in advance is my motter."

Valerie took a ten shilling note from her bag and waited for him to come and fetch it. He moved fast and the door closed behind him before Les could get back into the conversation.

"You're mad," he said at last. "He'll go straight off and spend it on potato crisps and the rest of the morning eating them. Even if he does go to Amorys he'll come back here and lie to us and ask for more money."

Valerie went over to the window.

"He *might* lie but it's worth the risk. I'm sure that he knows more than he's telling us, but I think he was speaking the truth about seeing old Granpa go out last night. And you realize what that might mean, don't you?"

"Yes, Val, I do. It means that cunning old Granpa really does know much more than he's admitted and that he really is spying at Amorys and playing a clever game of his own. And if that's so, can't you see that it proves my hunch that there is something valuable to be found there? I'm sure of it."

"There goes young George now. He's just come from round the back with his bike. If he looks up you'd better wave - just to show how much we trust and admire him... Now listen, Les. You're not thinking clearly about all this because you *will* hate people. You seem to hate everybody - except me, I hope. Think about this carefully and don't get in a rage. We don't yet know whether the Major even suspects that there is anything of value on his place and neither can we be certain how much those kids know. *They might be there because they know something.* I told you just now and I meant it, that I dare not be recognized by them. And if Aunt Em knew that they were actually here, and in the very place we're interested in, she'd have a fit.

What it comes down to is that you can carry on down here on your own, if you like, but I'm going back to London. Anyway I'm not going to be shouted at again. I've done enough for you, Les."

He put an arm clumsily round her shoulders.

"O.K. I'm sorry about that. I really am. I can't do without you, Val, and I don't want you to leave me now. If you're really scared of being recognized by that lot, why don't you go into Rye on the bus and get your hair dyed red or black or something and wear dark specs. Those kids haven't seen you yet, and if by a bit of bad luck they do see you about with me they'll never recognize you. They're not looking for you. They haven't a clue that you're down here and after all some women seem to change the colour of their hair every week so why shouldn't you?"

"Why not?" Valerie said with a catch in her voice. "Why not? You say you want me with you and then you're so angry that you say things no woman - except me - would put up with. I'll go into Rye, but before I go I want you to tell me just exactly what you think you're going to find at Amorys. We're running big risks and I want to know."

It was as well that Valerie did not see the look he gave her as he moved away from the window and began to pace the room.

"There's not much time to spare if you're going to catch the bus. I've told you all this once, but I'll try again. During the time the Romans were in Britain many of them worshipped a god called Mithras who was a god of light and truth. This religion spread from Persia to Rome about sixty years before the birth of Christ, and spread through the Roman Empire during the next three hundred years. They worshipped him as a sun god who appeared as a warrior and a protector of kings and soldiers. I can't tell you the whole legend now except that the god Mithras is supposed to have caught and slain a great bull as a sacrifice. It was a religion for men and full of mysteries and secrets which were only made known to those who studied it stage by stage under instruction from the priests. We do not know these secrets, but we do know that many temples were built throughout the Roman Empire and that many may still be discovered. The stone I showed you in the church here is a genuine Mithraic altar and you saw the

engraving of the bull on it. I believe there is such a temple at Amorys and I think the most likely place is underground - probably in that field running down to the road or maybe under the higher ground where the wood is now growing. The sea used to come right up to Oxney and the ships might well have landed the centurions quite close to where Amorys now stands."

"And suppose you find this temple? What then?"

"I told you before that we might find Roman relics of untold value. Gold and jewels and things used in the actual services. I just don't know for certain, Val, but I know the search is worth tremendous risks... Now listen. I've got an idea, and this is where you can help. You're not going to rat on me, are you?"

Valerie shook her head. "I don't think I am, Les. I'm a fool to say it but I'll stand by you. What's the idea?"

"You're a fine girl, Val," was her only thanks. "I knew you'd be quick to understand when I'd explained it carefully. I forget sometimes that other people can't possibly know as much about these things as I do. Now, look here. If Granpa was over at Amorys last night with a pick and a lantern he must be on to something, and we've got to find out what he knows before we do anything else. We've got to get into Amorys quickly and this is where you can help. I don't suppose that your fat old aunt is on the telephone, is she?"

"I don't think you need be quite as offensive as that, Les, but you're wrong. She is. It's her only extravagance because she hates going out."

"That's fine, and a pleasant surprise. I want somebody in London to send Bolshaw a telegram as soon as possible. It must be a really urgent message that will get him scuttling up to London. Get him out of the way. Suggest he meets some Roman expert or somebody like that. Say somebody is dead. Anything that the two of you can concoct. Telephone your slim and beautiful aunt from Rye just as soon as you can and ask her to send Bolshaw a wire at once. When you've finished in Rye and got your hair done, come back here right away. If we can get the old Major out of Amorys we'll soon find a way of dealing with that rabble of kids so that we



can get into the grounds and search them properly. Sorry about the bus but I must have the car here in case I have to move quickly. If I have to go out before you're back I'll leave a note in your room. I daren't leave a message with the Crumps as I don't trust them. You've got ten minutes although there's a couple of natives already waiting for the bus. You'll do this for me, won't you, Val?"

He stayed in the sitting room until the bus had gone, and then went down and sat on the bench where he had been insulted last evening. He sat with his elbows on the table cupping his bearded chin on clenched fists for he had plenty to think about. After a little he decided that if Granpa had some valuable information to sell it would be wiser to wait for him to make the first move. It might even be that Granpa and George really were in competition. Or perhaps they were both trying to make a fool of him? And now he came to think of it, perhaps George had already fooled him because he had no intention of cycling to Amorys and had merely found an easy way of winning ten shillings.

Les was still trying to puzzle it out when Granpa Crump strolled out, sat down next to him and began to fill an evil-smelling pipe.

"Arr," he said. "Nice mornin', young gennulman. You be restin'? Thought maybe you'd be out explorin' like on a nice day loike this."

Les watched as he lit and puffed at the horrible pipe. In a way he was rather a fine-looking old man with a brown face as wrinkled as an old apple. He looked physically tough too, although he was so thin, and there was no doubt that his eyes were shrewd. Les was suddenly sure that he had better be very careful.

"Your young lady gone into Rye, I reckon?" was Gran-pa's next suggestion, and there didn't seem any sense in denying it as anybody could have seen her getting on the bus.

"That's right, Granpa. Gone to do some shopping. You know what women are. How are you this fine morning?"

"I've bin thinkin' as I'd like a quiet talk with you, young gennulman. Privit loike. No women about. I reckon you gave young George some cash this morning. I doan't want you to do that. He be a fat, lazy liddle beggar and we doan't want you listenin' to his lies nor giving him money. I speak plain but I mean what I says."

This didn't sound like a prelude to a business talk but Les, for once, was determined not to quarrel until he had found out more so he just said, "That's O.K., Granpa. I see what you mean. Actually my girl friend gave him a few shillings, I believe. Asked some favour of him. A message or something. She seems to have taken quite a fancy to young George."

"Then she wants her head examined," said Granpa with conviction. "Now listen careful to me young gennulman while we've a chance. We got this place to ourselves for half an hour maybe till George and me datter-in-law who has gone to the village shop come back. I be goin' to talk straight to you because I've got something to sell what you want to buy. You wants to know if there's anything worth finding in Amorys. I knows there is and because I've made up me mind to sell this rotten old pub I'll sell you the proof you be lookin' for. And I'll sell it cheap if you brings me the money quick and no more questions asked... Now listen careful and doan't go askin' questions until I be finished."

"That's O.K., Granpa. I'm interested. Tell me what you know and how you can prove it to me. And don't waste my time with lies."

This was an unfortunate remark. Les thought he was being tough and strong but he only succeeded in making himself look foolish. The old man got up slowly and said, "Silly young fule you be. Reckoned you'd got some sense. If you reckon I be lying you can pack up your things and get out of here. Both of yer."

Les apologized for being so hasty and calmed him down by promising not to interrupt and begging him to tell his story.

It was an extraordinary tale with the ring of truth and in his slow way Granpa told it very well. This was the way of it.

Because he intended to get rid of the inn and to retire, he had recently been turning out a lot of rubbish in the attics in his search for papers about the Smuggler's Rest. One day, in a battered old trunk, he had found a family Bible which had belonged to his father. In the front of this Bible were spaces in which the owner wrote the names of his wife and children and of other relatives. As Granpa was turning the pages, looking at some of the lurid pictures, which he remembered being shown as a child, he found a letter addressed to himself. He explained, at this stage of his story, that he had this letter in a very safe place, and suggested to Les before he went further that this letter was what he had to sell.

"Hardly expect me to buy something without seeing it," Les interrupted.

"That'll be for you to decide when I tells yer what's in it. You can believe me or not as you please. I reckon there's plenty o' customers for this bit o' paper. I'm only tellin' you now to save meself the trouble of hawkin' it round. D'you want me to go on?"

Les nodded sulkily and the old man continued his story.

His father, he said, had lived in Oxney all his life and made his living as a well-digger, which in those days was a highly-skilled and sometimes dangerous occupation. One day he and his master were working on a big well either in or very near the grounds of Amorys.

"I were only a kid at the time," Granpa went on, "but I never forget the day they brought me dad home to our cottage over Wittersham way. They brought him on a hurdle. Pale as death he was with his eyes closed and they told us he couldn't use his legs and he never moved 'em again. They told our mother that the well had collapsed on them and that the master was dead. My dad lived many a long and weary year after that black day but 'e never walked again. All his life in his chair and his bed. We used to lift him to his bed. He was never a talker and not much of a writer and he died afore I was twenty. For fifty years that letter has been waiting for me in the old Bible and I tells you, young man, that it couldn't have been found at a time that suits me better for I'm gettin' out of this hole and I'm a'goin' some place where I won't be nagged by my fool datter-in-law and greedy young

George. I'm through and I'm tellin' you that you've come along jus' the right time if you means business."

Les was nearly convinced that Granpa was telling the truth. He was surely too confident to be lying. He was excited too.

"O.K. Granpa. That's fine. I'm sorry about your dad but what's in his letter? Something to do with the well, I suppose? Something they found there? Was the well at Amorys or not?"

Granpa stood up, knocked the ashes out of his pipe on his heel and then leaned against the doorpost looking with puckered eyes over Les's head into the distance.

"Be patient, young man. I'm waitin' to tell yer most o' what's there. It be right difficult to read so I've copied it meself and I've hid the copy where nobody'll find it... My dad tells me that just afore the sides of the well collapsed on 'em, his master, with his pick, broke through into something what looked like a big cave. They had a lantern with them and when he held it through the hole he says that they saw the gleam of metal... 'Gleam o' metal like gold', is what he wrote to me. Those were his very words. Afore they could see any more the well fell in and both of 'em were buried but the master was underneath. My dad says that he never dared to tell anyone of what 'e saw in those seconds afore the well fell in because he reckoned it was a great tomb - some sort o' burial place. All he knew was that they filled in the well next day and nobody knew what they'd seen."

Les was on his feet now with his eyes blazing with triumph.

"It's not a tomb, I tell you. It's a temple. I was right."

"It's a temple, is it? And what's a temple worth to you, young gennulman? My dad told me near enough where to find that old well. There's nobody else - not a soul - knows about this letter nor has seen it. I'm giving you the first refusal young gennulman and I'm telling you now that old Bolshaw hasn't got any money and 'e's a bit queer since 'is wife died."

"How much?" asked Les.

"A thousand quid, and you'd better let me know quick. I can't do much more waiting about and there's others up London way would pay that money, I reckon. You'd better be thinking this over quick," and he turned and went indoors leaving Les biting his nails. Les wanted that letter but he had not got a thousand pounds and did not know how to raise it.

## 8. The Siege

It was not surprising that the boys should sleep late after the night adventure. Jon was the first to wake. Drowsily he reached for his watch. Ten past nine. He sniffed appreciatively at the smell of frying bacon and sat up in the blissful knowledge that somebody else was getting breakfast.

He woke David to tell him the glad news but he was morose and unco-operative. Dickie was only a small bundle under the bedclothes, and as he had had rather a rough night Jon let him sleep on. He got out of bed and drew the curtains. It was a wonderful morning and the sun was already hot. On the chest of drawers was the letter addressed to him by the Major but he did not re-read it. He was not likely to forget the contents, but he suddenly thought that it might be a good idea to look again at the old man's room.

The door was closed and Jon knocked on it, as they had done last night, in the hope that he might have come home. But, of course he had not. The bed was still tidy, and no sign indicated that the old man had rushed out at a few minutes notice. So it seemed that what he had written was all that they would know about this surprising decision.

Jon closed the door behind him unhappily. On the way to the bathroom he met David who scowled at him and said, "I must say you're just about the noisiest bloke I've ever had the misfortune to share a room with - particularly in the early morning. What are you up to anyway, and who's cooking bacon?"

Jon smiled at him pityingly. "Penny of course. She's doing it for me because she loves me."

David slammed the bathroom door and Jon, in a much better humour went back to wake Dickie who jumped out of bed with a wild cry, "Gosh! It's late. I'm starving. I can smell breakfast. You've eaten it first, you beasts."

He was reassured, and ten minutes later they were all round the kitchen table where Penny and Mary basked in the appreciation of their males.

David had got over his early-morning blues, Mary was rather smug, and Penny looked very much happier than yesterday in spite of a broken night.

As she passed David his second cup of tea, she said, "As all of you must be more or less gorged by now, I think it's time we had a conference about what we're going to do. Last night seems like a sort of bad dream, but I feel much better this morning because I've got rid of the silly idea that I was seeing a ghost. Will you read us the Major's letter again, Jon? Everything seems different in the morning, doesn't it? And Dickie - don't hesitate to help yourself if you want anything else to eat, will you? We should all hate to think that you were hungry."

Dickie laughed as he spread marmalade generously on another slice of bread.

"I have to eat a lot to stay strong," he explained. "I didn't have time to do much thinking last night, but I'm sure we're going to be busy with another adventure... What do you think twin, if you're not too superior this morning to utter - if you know what I mean."

"I do know," Mary said. "And don't show off as well as being greedy... Let Jon read the letter again."

"I looked in the Major's room just now," Jon began as he unfolded the letter. "There's nothing more to see there, but I'm sure that when he left us last night he had made up his mind to go. This is what he wrote.

*"My dear Jonathan,*

*"I am addressing this to you because I am sure you are a responsible lad and I would like to think that you and your friends will trust and help me. I have not time now to give you all my reasons, hut I have decided to go away for a day or two to get some advice about my personal and private affairs. Your welcome arrival here has roused me to fresh thinking, and made me realize that I have been living very much in the past since my dear wife left me. I am aware that my unannounced temporary absence may cause you all some embarrassment, but I did not feel equal to discussing my sudden*

*decision with you all after the 'banquet' which you so generously gave in my honour.*

*"Now I have to ask you all to take charge of Amorys in my absence. I have no right to ask you to do this but have little hesitation in doing so. Although I have only known you all for a few hours, I trust you and indeed there is nobody else I can ask at such short notice. I cannot tell you more for if I do not leave now but wait until tomorrow I fear that I may find many reasons for changing my mind. Please make full use of the house and grounds. Do what you will and enjoy yourselves but please never leave Amorys entirely unattended and never allow anyone else in under any pretext, reason or excuse, until I return.*

*"If you all decide that you cannot accept the responsibility I shall understand that I have no right to ask this service of you. My warmest wishes to you and I make bold to send my love to Penelope and Mary.*

*Yours affectionately*

*Antony Bolshaw."*

Mary broke a long silence.

"I don't think I was listening properly when you read it to us last night, Jon. What a sad and mysterious old man. I'm glad his name is Antony. I wanted to ask him because we couldn't go on calling him Major all the time. When he comes back we can call him Uncle Antony. Or Major Antony - or p'raps just Antony."

"We may be lucky to call him anything ever again," David said. "I didn't say much last night because we'd all had about enough, but this is the craziest thing I've ever heard of. He's no right to ask us to stay here and guard his property when we don't even know if and when he's coming back. And why should we?"

Penny flushed. "That's ungenerous of you, David. You're beginning to make Jon and me feel guilty about getting you over here. It's my fault, I suppose, and I'm sorry. Day before yesterday when we saw the old chap he was kind



to me and pathetic and lonely too. I persuaded Jon to come here and now we've over-persuaded you and the twins. Would you all rather pack up and go back to the Dolphin?"

The twins looked across at their brother who was staring at his plate. Then he looked up, smiled shamefacedly and apologized.

"I'm sorry, Penny. I'm behaving badly and I know you think I'm being unreasonably suspicious. Of course we must stay here until the Major comes back, but there aren't enough of us to guard the house front and back and the grounds. Wish Peter was here."

"Ha! Ha!" Dickie gloated, taking care to be out of his reach. "That's why you're grumpy. We all wish Peter was here, but you miss her more than all of us and *that's* something that everybody here jolly well knows. He's pining for Peter. He's a poop 'cos he pines for his Peter."

David joined in the laugh against himself. "All right then. Now that we've got that established let's get back to the Major. Let's try and reason it out. He doesn't say how long he'll be away----"

"He said a day or two," Jon interrupted.

"O.K. He doesn't say where he has gone or how he went. There's no telephone here and he hasn't got a car, but I suppose he's got a bike. He may be quite close or he may have cycled to a station. None of us can really leave to make enquiries and I don't suppose it would help us much if we did know where he went. I was suspicious because he's relying on us and yet doesn't trust us enough to tell us more. It's a fantastic situation because we don't know what we're supposed to be guarding."

"We're beginning to get an idea," Jon said. "He said something in the letter about 'personal and private affairs', so it's my guess he's gone to London and that he cycled to Hastings last night ready for the first train to London. There are very few trains from Rye now and perhaps he didn't want to be recognized there anyway. I can't imagine *why* he went off halfway through the night, except that he's a very anxious, worried old man."

"It's almost as if something happened last night that made him come to a sudden decision, and then he acted before he had time to change his mind," Penny said shrewdly. "In spite of David's suspicions I'm sure we've got to stay here and do as Major Antony asks. He may be a little peculiar and unusual, but he likes and trusts us, and I'm not going to let him down. What about you, Jon? You're not saying much."

"No chance to speak, Penny. I'm with you. The Warrenders will hold the fort alone if necessary, but I know the Mortons are on our side. We might be in for some trouble but we've been in that before, so we might as well be in it together again. Although we must remember that we're in charge of these silly little twins. We mustn't get too involved."

Mary opened her mouth to protest and then realized that he was teasing. "Acksherley," she said. "Acksherley we are besieged. Acksherley we are already in this adventure and I don't think we could get out now. We may be surrounded by enemies at this very instant. Old Dogkicker may have summoned all his varlets-----"

"His *what*, twin?" Dickie interrupted. "I'm sorry, but I'm not with you with varlets."

"Ignorant," Mary continued. "Just ignorant. Varlets are slaves or something like that had by people who had castles and drawbridges. I was sayin' that old Dogkicker Ginger Whiskers may be gathering all sorts of slaves and varlets and utterly surrounding us and this castle."

"What we want is a moat all round," Dickie suggested. "Jon and David, because they're the biggest, had better start digging it now. They can begin at the front gate and dig down to the canal which is only about half a mile... And while they're doin' that we can be getting on with the stores of food... Great jumping Jiminy Cricket, twin. I've had a ghastly thought. If none of us can leave the castle unguarded how can we get in enough food. Jon and Penny! Tell us. Did Mrs. Warrender know we had got to live through a siege? Unless Fred Vasson can bring a wagon train of food right up to the edge of the moat we may have to eat rats before the Major comes back."

Jon tried to grab him across the table but Dickie dodged and Mary took up the tale.

"And while the big strong boys are digging the moat and you're eating fried rats, twin, Penny an' me will be sitting up on yonder battlements either weaving a tapestry or----"

"Knitting scarves," Penny interrupted. "All right, twins. You've had your fun and we're all laughing. Indeed we'll go on laughing while you wash up... Jon wants to say something important now. I can tell by the look in his eye."

"Only that as nobody but ourselves is likely to know that the Major has gone away it might be as well, if we have any visitors, just to say that he's not very well and is having a day or two in bed."

"You mean that we'd be more likely to be besieged if the enemy knew the old man wasn't here?" David said. "You could be right. Trouble is we're not sure who *is* our enemy."

"Dogkicker!"

"Ginger Whiskers!" shouted Dickie and Mary.

"But what about the tall, thin man in a helmet who was in the spinney last night, chipping away in the little quarry that I fell into?" Penny asked as she began to clear the table. "Where does he fit in? We're probably surrounded by enemies! And now you boys can wash up while us girls make the beds."

"Fair enough," Jon agreed. "I suppose we shall have to divide our forces and while two stay on guard in the house, the others must explore the spinney and that quarry properly. If there's anything to be found at Amorys it will be down there, I'm sure."

They were all in the scullery by now, but before anyone could answer him they were startled by a knock on the back door. Dickie dropped a cup in surprise.

"It's the enemy," he hissed. "He's come to parley. Don't open the door till I've looked out of the landing window to see who it is."

They all stood still as statues while he bolted upstairs. Then Mary picked up the pieces of broken china and Penny, with ridiculous thoughts again of a Roman officer in a plumed helmet, jumped with surprise when the stranger knocked again.

"This is ridiculous. I'm going to open the door," David began, but before he had taken two steps Dickie was back again.

"It's a fat boy with a pimply face. He's eating. I'm not keen on him but I don't think he's the real enemy. Shall Mackie see him off? Mary and me will do him if you like."

"Stay where you are," Jon said. "I'll see what he wants."

George Crump had seen the Lone Piners from an upstairs window of the inn but they did not know him. Jon's first impression was that he was the most repulsive boy he had ever seen. George stared at him with his jaws slowly moving and Jon, although reluctant to break the silence, had to speak first.

"Good morning," he said, conscious that Penny was just behind him. "What do you want?"

"I wants the Major. I've come for grocery order. He always gives me order. I wants to see him personal."

"You can't do that," Jon said. "Major Bolshaw is not well today and is in bed. If you'll wait a few minutes we'll go up to his room and see what he wants."

"'E's ill, is 'e? That be too bad. I doan't mind waiting in the kitchen. I always comes into the kitchen while 'e works out 'is order. I come out this morning without me breakfast. I got a big round on me bike gettin' in the orders and I gets 'ungry round about this time... You two stayin' 'ere with the Major? He never said you was coming last week. Stayin' long? Relations I reckon? Maybe you've got a bit o' toast and jam I could 'ave while I'm waitin' for the

order," and he stepped into the passage. Jon promptly pushed him outside and Penny saw a quick gleam of hatred in the fat boy's piggy eyes and was suddenly suspicious. This was no grocer's boy. As likely as not he was a spy.

She nudged Jon and said meaningfully, "I'll go up and see the Major, Jon, and fix the order with him. I won't be long and meanwhile I expect you'd like to stop with this boy and explain that we eat all our toast at breakfast. I'll send the others out too. I'm sure the twins would like to meet him."

Jon took the hint and planted himself firmly in the doorway while George glowered at him from a few feet away. When the twins squeezed past Jon and were followed by David, George began to wonder how he was going to handle the situation. They looked a soppo lot of kids - except perhaps the tall, fair lout who had just shoved him out of the house. And the other chap looked tough too. But the twins were soppo. No doubt of that.

Dickie and Mary, dressed alike in blue jeans and T-shirts, stood in front of him and regarded him with wide-eyed astonishment.

"Who is our new friend?" Mary asked.

"We do not know his name," Jon explained. "He has come for the grocery order and Penny has gone up to see the Major about it. Our friend wanted to sit in the kitchen and have some toast and jam while waiting, but I persuaded him that fresh air is better than too much starchy food... Where's Macbeth, twins?"

"Down in the wood I expect, but I don't think we'll need him," Dickie said, and they all knew what he meant. He turned to Jon and was given a slight nod of encouragement. Mary saw it too and opened the game.

"Tell us about grocery shops," she said winningly. "It must be wonderful to work in one 'cos however hungry you are you can always do something about it. We can see that you don't look hungry though. Does your shop sell sweets and ices and lollies an' things like that? An' please tell us something else. Do you bring the orders round after you've taken them?"

George glowered at them but made no answer.

"Can you *hear* me?" Mary persisted. "I haven't asked you anything rude, I hope? Isn't he peculiar, twin? He doesn't answer. He's very, very handsome but he has an infirmary."

"No twin," Dickie interrupted. "It isn't an infirmary he has, I'm sure... You haven't got an infirmary have you?"

George was still glowering and truth was that he did not know what an infirmary was. He was suspicious but he just did not know so he did not answer - not even when he realized that the two bigger boys were grinning at him.

"You're right, Dickie," David said. "She doesn't mean infirmary. She means infirmity, don't you, Mary?"

Mary laughed merrily.

"Of course I do. He has an infirmity. He's deaf. Isn't it sad? Here we are prattling away to him and he can't hear a word."

"You shut up, you two," George growled.

Mary clapped her hands in thankfulness.

"He's cured, twin. He can hear. Oh, joyful day! Now I can ask you something very, very important. Does your shop keep oil? A lot of oil. We want a lot of oil here suitable for boiling in."

George, in spite of himself, goggled at her.

"For boilin' in, you silly little crackpot?"

"That's right," Dickie confirmed. "For boiling people in. People like you, you great fat crackpot. We're going to be besieged here like in a castle and if we can catch any of our enemies we're going to boil 'em in oil. Have you got enough oil in your shop for boiling in?"

"And cauldrons to put the oil in, to put the enemies in," Mary continued brightly. "And boar's heads for eating and lutes for playing on."

It was now obvious that George was completely out of his depth. He did not know what they were talking about and yet was sure that they were making a fool of him. He was outnumbered, and the wicked-looking little black dog which he had seen attack Mr. Dale was watching him almost hungrily. He was still trying hard to think of something devastating to say when Penny came back and handed him a long list.

"There you are and thank you for calling. That's what we want and the Major would like to know whether you can deliver this afternoon. Can you manage that?"

"I reckon so," George said cautiously. At times like Christmas when he was specially greedy, he earned some pocket-money by cycling round for orders for the grocer at Wittersham. Now he had no idea whether anybody else did that nor when deliveries were made. If the Major had answered the door, he might have thought of another excuse for getting into the house and grounds, but he feared that these smart-alecs had made a fool of him.

He put the order in his pocket and made one more effort to get some information. He even tried a smile!

"Thanks very much. Compliments to the Major. You all staying here for long?"

"Depends what you mean by long," David said. "How long is a piece of string for instance?"

"No need to be funny," George growled. "There's no call for it. You won't think it so funny when you sees the ghost of Amorys. Maybe old Major ain't told you about him yet. You just ask 'im."

"Of course we'll ask him when he's better," Penny said. "We don't want to worry him just now because he's got a headache. Where is the ghost seen? In the house or in the garden?"

"Acksherley," Mary said. "We're rather good at ghosts. We like them and they like us. We put down breadcrumbs for them at night and they come when we whistle. Have you seen the Amorys ghost?"

"I never *sin* 'im but lots have. Tall thin ghost he is. Wears a comic sort of hat like an 'elmet. 'Tis no joke to see this old devil. Bad luck to see 'im. Some says he was a wicked murderer what was 'anged down here somewhere. Some says the old smugglers cut 'is throat for interferin' with their work... You wants to watch out if you sees 'im. I wouldn't stay another minute in the place if I saw that thin old ghost. People have dropped down dead after a sight of 'im... You ask old Major. Maybe his wife saw the thin old ghost and that's why he's alone now. You lot want to be careful... Cheerio all. Be seeing you."

"I hope *not*" Jon said under his breath and then as George disappeared round the side of the house he spoke to Dickie, "Run through to the front door and see where he goes. Watch him without him seeing you. Do an invisible boy act." Before he had finished speaking Dickie had disappeared.

"Nasty youth," David said. "I doubt if he really came for a grocery order. How's the Major, Penny?"

Penny sighed. "I hate being a liar, and I'm so bad at it too. I s'pose you know that the ghost he described was the thin man we saw on a bike last night. Do ghosts ride bikes? He said he never *sin* 'im but if he never sin 'im how could he describe what we saw last night? Oh dear! This is all getting more and more complicated, and here comes Dickie bearing tidings, as Mary would say."

"What d'you think?" Dickie gasped. "I thought that chap was a smelly old skunk and so he is. I've been an invisible boy. He never saw me. Didn't see me, I mean. Sorry! I'm talking like him now. I sin 'im. He got on his bike and after he'd wobbled along a few yards he took out Penny's grocery list, crumpled it up in a ball and threw it away. I was just waiting for him to get into the lane before I picked up the paper when he came back himself, searched round a bit until he found it and then stuffed it in his pocket. He's no grocery boy. He's a spy."



"Full marks for Spy Richard Morton," his brother said. "That proves it. I'm convinced and I'm sorry if I seemed suspicious. Let's make a plan. We're mixed up in something nasty again."

While they were clearing up they agreed that there was every indication that somebody had information which was not even known to the Major. It was doubting David who was the first to insist that whatever happened they should do as the Major had asked them and hold the fort until he came back.

"What's more," he went on, "If there's anything worthwhile to be found here then it's up to us to find it first and keep it for the Major. I bet that, whatever it is, it will be found either in the copse or that little quarry place where Penny fell in last night."

"Trouble is that there aren't enough of us," Jon said. "I know we talked about that before, but it's true. I wouldn't leave Penny or Mary alone to guard the house, for instance. We want two in the house at least and two down in the spinney or on the grassy bit below the gorse bushes above the quarry. There's only five of us. Anyway we've got to do it somehow, and we ought to have some signals or an alarm system so that people down in the spinney can warn those guarding the house if they see anything suspicious. Another complication is that, unless our enemies are in a desperate hurry they're more likely to attack at night."

The twins were now sitting on the table swinging their legs. They looked pleased with themselves.

"You can't count, Jon. It's a pity 'cos you've forgotten that we're six not five. You've forgotten Mackie. You always do, and if he wasn't so unselfish and big-hearted he'd never forgive you. But he does, and he'll fight for you to the death. Acksherley, we've got a brilliant idea. Dickie an' me, with Mackie to guard us and give us the alarm, will make a fortified look-out and arm it with cannon balls, an' boiling oil and all that lark. We could camp there at night too and I'm sure we could make an alarm."

"Easy," Dickie said, looking at the wall above the kitchen door where there were still three old bells on coiled springs. "Easy. There's miles of string in

that dresser drawer. We could make an alarm by fixing one end of the string to that bell and running the string right through to our camp. We'll toll that old bell if we see anything suspicious."

The others agreed that this was worth trying, and they would have to risk going down together to the spinney and the camping place to see if it really was possible for the twins to make a fortified lookout. First they shut and latched every window in the house, locked both doors and took the keys with them. Before they went out, however, Dickie produced six balls of reasonably stout string which he had previously found in the dresser, pointing out that it would be more sensible to run what he called their life-line back to the kitchen from the camp rather than start unwinding it now, as they were leaving the house unguarded.

Next they explored a shed in which they found a spade, a mattock - "Useful for cleaving the enemy with," Mary observed - and two old pails. They also found evidence that the Major kept a bicycle there, so it seemed reasonable to assume that he had used it to escape last night.

"I've got an idea," Mary said as she looked at the pails. "We shall want weapons to repel the enemy from the battlements. If we could take water down in those pails we could make some mud cannon balls out of the earth we dig up. And look! Poor old Major has been living out of tins for ages and piling all the empties over there. Tins filled with stones are useful weapons as we can't very well boil oil."

Heavily laden they staggered down through the orchard and through the dismal spinney. Penny wanted to search this properly to see if they could find any clues left by last night's mysterious visitor, but she was persuaded to wait until after they had established a fortified outpost.

"This look-out idea is a good one," David said, "so let's do as much work on it as we can before it gets any hotter. It's going to be a sweltering day, and have you noticed how dry it is in here? You'd better not have a camp fire down here, twins. A spark in this wood when the wind is strong and it would go up like a bomb."

"We might lure the enemy into it and then set it alight," Dickie suggested. "Specially if old Dogkicker is the enemy. I bet his beard would burn."

"You're a couple of little horrors," Penny said. "Let's get on. I hate this wood. It's got a stuffy smell and it's too dark... All the same I wish I knew what that tall man in the helmet was doing here last night."

They all felt a sense of relief when they were in the sunshine again and could look over the gorse bushes to the canal and the Marsh beyond.

"It's a good place," Jon said thoughtfully. "It really is. Nobody could get up to the house or into the wood without climbing up what Penny fell down last night. Full marks for the twins. With Mackie to guard them I'm sure we could leave them providing we fix up some sort of signal. What shall we do, Dickie? Dig a trench and pile the earth in front of you so that you can shelter in case of attack. What do you think?"

Dickie was not used to being spoken to like that by Jon who usually patronized them.

"Yes, Jonathan," he said seriously. "That would be the best plan, I consider. And we can use some of the earth we dig up for cannon balls. I s'pose you and David will have to do the digging just because you're bigger. We'll concentrate on the ammo. Come on twin. Roll up your sleeves and wallow in some mud."

David got to work first, lifting the turf carefully so that it could be put back again when the trench was filled in. Then Jon took a turn with the mattock and broke up the surface soil so that it was easier to shovel out. There was no need to dig a deep trench because the twins were not very big, so it was not long before the rampart was high enough. Meanwhile Penny, although not caring much for the task, helped to make mud cannon balls by squeezing earth between her hands in a bucket of water and then setting them in the sun to dry. Down among the brambles Dickie was meanwhile filling old tins with stones and earth and making some dangerous projectiles. Quite soon they were all well-armed and had reasonable protection against attack.

Penny then suggested that she and Jon should go back to the house and get something for lunch, and that from now on it would be wiser if the house was not left unguarded.

"I'm not keen on going back there by myself," she admitted. "None of us ought to walk about the grounds here alone. If David stays with the twins one of you can run up to the house if you see anything suspicious... Tie one end of the string to the spade, Dickie, and we'll take the rest to see if it reaches the house."

So Jon and Penny went back together, unwinding the string and tying the end of one ball to the next. They did not speak much until they were in the orchard and then Jon said, "Rum sort of holiday isn't it, Penny? It seems about a year ago that I met you at the station and we made fools of ourselves in the canal. You haven't told the others about that, have you?"

Penny laughed. "Of course not. That's our secret, and there was only one fool not two. *Jon, I believe there's somebody snooping round the house.* I'm sure I saw somebody disappearing round the corner by the back door."

Jon dropped the ball of string he was carrying and raced ahead. Penny followed slowly, wondering whether her imagination was playing tricks with her again. But it was not. Just as she reached the back door Jon appeared round the house with a girl about her own age, dressed in bright blue tight-fitting pants and a scarlet blouse. Her lips matched the blouse and she seemed to have lost her eyebrows and drawn a poor imitation of them in with charcoal. Penny did not like the way she was looking at Jon.

"Well you see," the girl was saying. "What was I to do? I come down specially on me bike with this telegram what is reply paid to the Major and the place is locked up. I mean, what would you do? Here was I doing a favour for Mrs. Harris what has the Post Office and everybody knows the Major never goes away so I volunteered like. See?"

"Yes," Jon agreed. "I see what you mean. How long have you been knocking and ringing?"

"I dunno. 'Bout ten minutes maybe." Then she looked down her nose at Penny. "Everybody in the village knows there's some kids staying here so I was sure somebody would be about."

Penny held out her hand. "If you'll kindly give me the telegram I will take it to the Major. He is not very well and is spending a day or two in bed. As the kids who are looking after him were doing some jobs for him in the garden, we locked the doors and windows to keep inquisitive messenger girls from disturbing him. Please give me the key, Jon, and while I show the Major his telegram no doubt you will be able to entertain our visitor," and with that parting shot she took the key and the orange envelope and went into the house.

She knew she had been rude and she did not care. The way things were going made her suspicious of everybody. This nasty girl was probably another spy and the telegram a fake, but as the Major was not here she intended to read it. She went upstairs into the Major's empty room where she read the message.

YOUR ADVICE AND HELP URGENTLY NEEDED ABOUT ROMAN  
RELICS ON OXNEY STOP PLEASE MAKE SPECIAL EFFORT TO  
COME LONDON IMMEDIATELY STOP WIRE TIME ARRIVAL STOP  
FEE AND ALL EXPENSES PAID FROM ROMAN DEPARTMENT  
BRITISH MUSEUM LONDON.

Penny had to think quickly. She was almost sure that the Major had once said something about a friend in London who knew about Roman antiquities, but this message was not signed with a name although it sounded genuine enough. She put the flimsy paper back in the orange envelope, shoved it in the pocket of her jeans and went downstairs again.

She was pleased to see that Jon was looking rather sheepish and the girl had apparently run out of conversation, so Penny smiled sweetly at them both and said, "Thank you so much for bringing the telegram. The Major is grateful but he says there is no reply. Yes, he knows it's reply paid, but he doesn't want to say anything. I expect he'll write when he's not so tired. Good morning. Isn't it a lovely day? Jon dear, I expect you'd like to help this young lady on to her bike. I'm going to get the lunch now."

Jon smiled good humouredly as he followed the girl, and when he came back a few minutes later Penny showed him the telegram.

"Clever old you," he said. "Couldn't say anything else, could you, as we don't know where the old chap is? I suppose the message is genuine and it was certainly sent from London this morning. Why did you behave like a red-headed little devil to that stupid girl?"

"She was making eyes at you," Penny said simply. "Let's cut sandwiches, and take them down to the fort. We'll ask David to stay on guard here until we've decided what to do this afternoon and leave some food for him."

They did this and David had no objection. He said that he wanted peace and quiet to write to his girl friend Peter, who had not been able to come south with them. The twins were delighted with their rations, admitted even by Dickie to be generous, and when they had finished eating and drinking they climbed out of their shallow trench and lay on the grass beside Penny and Jon. For a while they dozed in the sun, enjoying the smell of the gorse and the freshly turned soil of their fortifications.

After a while Jon sat up suddenly and said, "Wake up, you lazy lot. I've just heard a car stop in the lane. Stay with the twins, Penny, and I'll go and support David. If there's any trouble down here send Mary up to the house. May not be anything but we've had two odd visitors already today."

Penny sat up and shook back her hair.

"All right, Jon. Come back as soon as you can and let us know what's happened. And see if you can fix the string to the alarm bell in the kitchen."

He nodded and ran through the spinney and the orchard until he heard voices and realized that David was speaking to a man. Jon slackened his pace so that he would not be too breathless when he appeared, and for a moment he listened before stepping on to the terrace in the front of the house. He was not altogether surprised to hear the unmistakable voice of the man so aptly named the Dogkicker by Dickie.

"Don't be ridiculous, boy. I want to see Bolshaw urgently. Just go and tell him that Les Dale wants to talk business - good business - with him. He knows me."

David was leaning against the closed front door.

"Yes he does know you," he said. "And now we know *your* name, Dale. My young brother calls you Dogkicker, and I expect we shall continue to think of you in that way. Hello, Jon. This is Les Dale. You met him before we did, I know. He's asking to see the Major, and doesn't believe that he's overtired and having a day or two in bed while we're here to look after him."

"Silly old him," Jon said. "What does he want with the Major anyway? You can leave a message with us, Dale. Are you still staying with those delightful people at the Smuggler's Rest?"

Both boys noticed with satisfaction that a muscle on Dale's face was twitching beneath the sandy stubble. He was angry.

"I'm sick and tired of you kids. You're lying. Old Bolshaw isn't in bed. He's not in the house. He's gone off and left you to your own silly kids' pranks. He's probably gone to London, and if you lot have got any sense you'll clear out and keep out of trouble. You're interfering in something that doesn't concern you."

"You're wrong," David said quietly, although he was extremely shaken by what he had just heard. "You're wrong in thinking that we're interfering. Everything round here concerns us. You concern us, chum. Jon! Let's show him the way out, and if he's difficult we'll call up his favourite dog."

So David took one arm and Jon the other and turned Les round until he was facing the gate. He was white with anger because he realized that if he struggled he would not have much chance with these two boys who were obviously very strong. He may have sensed too that David in particular was spoiling for a fight, so instead of struggling he began to swear at them as they marched him down the drive.

"Shut up you," Jon said quietly and hit him across the mouth with his free hand. "I meant that - and don't struggle or we'll have to drag you to your car. You're the third type we've had nosing round here today and we're tired of it. Leave Amorys and Major Bolshaw alone, and don't come back. We know what you're after and if there's any more nonsense I shall ask the Major if we can call in the police. This is private property and you'd better stay off... Open the car door for him, David and we'll help him in."

David, who had never known Jon to behave like this, opened the car door and stepped back with a grin. Les was then silly enough to aim a blow at Jon who saw it coming and ducked. Les howled with pain as his fist hit the edge of the door and they pushed him in almost without protest. He drove off down the lane towards the main road and the boys watched the car until it was out of sight.

"I don't care for that chap," Jon said rather unnecessarily. "He annoys me. I'm an old square about swearing. Practically a cube... How did he know that old Bolshaw had gone to London? And if he knew why did he ask to see him?"

"He may have been guessing," David said with a shrug as he turned back towards the house. "I wouldn't let him into the hall, and our story that the old boy is in bed is a bit thin really. He was probably just spying round but he's dead keen to get in, isn't he? What about the others?"

Jon agreed to go back to the fort and tell them, but first the two boys finished off the "life-line" by joining up more balls of string and running one end through the kitchen window and fixing it to the alarm bell.

"I doubt if it will work," David said. "The string is too long and is sure to break somewhere. Now I'm going to finish my letter to Peter... You arrived at just the right moment."

"Heard the car stop in the lane. How *did* he know the old man had gone away? It's almost as if he knew what was in that telegram. How could he know about something that was sent from London?"



"Only if he tricked that stupid girl from the Post Office. Don't say too much to Penny and the twins, Jon, but I've got the feeling that we're in for trouble. That chap won't give in just because we've seen him off. I think he knows that the Major isn't here. He's not a fool."

So Jon went back to the fort and gave the others news of Les which amused them very much.

"Acksherley," Mary said, "we heard the car going off down the hill but it didn't go along the road to Rye. We should have seen it. So I s'pose it must have gone to Appledore and round that way to the Smuggler's Rest, if that's where he's still living."

"And another thing, Jon," Dickie broke in. "We're getting a bit bored here. Maybe we're not going to be attacked from the rear and we think we could be out taunting somebody somewhere if you know what I mean."

"Yes, we know," Penny admitted. "Being besieged must always have been rather a bore but this was your idea and you can't desert now. It's still possible that somebody will try and get into this place from the road although if they've got any sense they'll wait until it's dark."

"So we can't go a'taunting?" Mary pleaded. "We think you two are being rather foul. Why don't you have a nice cosy chat together while we explore down here. You haven't had much opportunity of nice little private talks. We're going to search the wood with Mackie, but we promise not to go far away in case there's a battle. All besieged soldiers on the ramparts must have some exercise. Come on, twin! Follow us, my brave and fearless hunting hound."

Macbeth, who seemed to be feeling the heat, dragged himself to his feet and reluctantly followed his beloved master and mistress into the gloom of the spinney. No dog had ever looked less like a fearless hunting hound!

"We ought to be searching the field and the wood inch by inch," Jon said as Penny sat beside him on the earthworks. "We'll let the twins run round for a bit, and then put them back on guard while the two of us explore. I ought to relieve David in the house soon if he wants a break."

"I would do that," Penny said. "I could lock myself in."

"Splendid idea. And how do you get out of the house and warn us here while somebody is trying to get in? Sorry, Penny, but I'm not going to leave you in there alone. Really there should be two of us there and three down here."

He suddenly gripped her arm so that she nearly cried out with surprise and pain.

"Look," he whispered. "Someone is getting through the wire fence at the bottom of the field. You can see here just between the gorse bushes. Go and fetch the twins and then run up to the house and tell David. Stay with him Penny, unless we ring the alarm bell which will mean that we're in trouble. This might be a trick to get us all down here so that they can get into the house."

Penny flashed him a smile and fled into the wood. Jon crouched, in considerable discomfort, behind the ramparts and was amused to see the twins emerging from the narrow entrance to the wood on their stomachs. They advanced with considerable speed, but the effect was rather spoiled by Macbeth who persisted in prancing round them playfully.

"Who is it? What sort of an enemy?" Dickie hissed as he rolled into the trench.

"Male or female? Man, woman or child?" Mary added.

"Male, I think," Jon whispered. "We must all stay quiet and hidden here until this chap gives himself away. If he's really after something either down below in all that rubbish or in the wood he'll give himself away soon. Let him come close enough for us to recognize him. Once we've seen who he is we can attack him and throw him out."

"Unless it would be better to take him prisoner and then torture him until he tells us all we want to know," Dickie suggested with relish. "Do you think it could possibly be Dogkicker come back to try again? I hope it is."

"Might be," Jon said. "Didn't look like him though. This chap was fattish. Keep Mackie quiet, Mary. We don't want him to give us away until we attack. And Dickie, get us all a supply of cannon balls while I move that pail of muddy water over to the edge. We may be able to give our visitor a shower bath."

As soon as their ammunition was ready to hand, they lay on the soil behind the rampart. They all dozed for a few minutes until a blackbird chattered an alarm and Jon breathed a warning, "Somebody there. Somebody who knows his way about. He's very quiet. Don't move until I say."

Now they heard a twig snap, the sound of a rolling pebble and stealthy footsteps. Then followed a long silence which, Jon guessed, was because the trespasser may have seen the rampart and be wondering what it was. Presently another footstep and the sound of somebody whistling tunelessly. Again scuffling footsteps on the gravel below. Jon nodded to Dickie and looked meaningly at the pail of water. Dickie snaked round the rampart and, still lying flat peered down. Then, very stealthily, he got to his feet, lifted the bucket and with a whoop of triumph emptied it on to the intruder below who announced himself with a gurgling yell of rage.

"It's the grocer's fat boy!" Dickie shouted triumphantly. "Get out of here you trespasser. Get out! Or surrender. You're my prisoner."

Dripping with muddy water, George Crump looked up to see the twins' peering above the gorse bushes and, just behind them, the tall fair chap with specs. The hated little dog was also barking furiously a few feet above and he realized that he was outnumbered. He made one last hopeless and dangerous gesture however. He stooped, picked up a large stone and flung it at the faces of his enemies. He was never to know whether he had scored a hit for he suddenly found himself belaboured by balls of earth, some of which were uncomfortably hard and others unpleasantly damp. He was hit on the head, on the shoulder, and when he turned his back he was thumped on his behind. Then he heard the dog being urged to pursue him. With a cry of fury George fled back through the clinging brambles and nettles and down the field, the little black devil of a dog snapping at his heels. He had difficulty in squeezing through the fence, because the dog bit his ankle, and the twins were still in hot pursuit. But he got through, mounted his bicycle

which he had left on the verge and pedalled furiously away to the sound of jeers from the twins. He was to suffer one further indignity, however, for Dickie had prudently brought with him the last of the squashy mud balls. These were now flung at the retreating enemy. Dickie was a strong little boy and was beginning to enjoy cricket at school. With a flash of inspiration he tried to imagine that George's back was the wicket. It was a good throw, and lucky too, for the last of the 'cannon balls' struck the unfortunate George in the back of his plump neck.

Poor George Crump! With a cry of anguish he fell from his bicycle and lay for a while beside it as the two wheels spun in the sunshine. Then the twins called Macbeth to heel and walked back up the hill. Jon came to meet them.

"That was a good performance," he said. "And a very good throw, Dickie. I don't think he'll trouble us any more and I doubt if anyone else will try from the road for a while. Let's go up to the house and see how the others are getting on. What's the matter with you, Mary? You don't look as if you've just won a famous victory."

"I know," Mary admitted. "I can't help it but I'm sorry for that fat boy. I think he was *crying* when he fell off his bike. Sometimes I think wars and fighting are silly. All the same Dickie was *fabulous*, wasn't he?"

Jon nodded but Dickie said nothing. He knew what Mary meant.

David and Penny were sitting in the sunshine on the terrace in front of the house. It was obvious that they were enjoying a pleasant chat and had heard nothing of the battle waged between the fort and the road. The twins wasted no time in telling them about it, and when Jon explained that they wanted tea he followed Penny into the kitchen to help her get it.

"What are we going to do tonight, Penny? Barricade ourselves in the house and let the enemy do what they like in the spinney and the field? The twins say they wouldn't mind sleeping down there with Mackie now that they've got an alarm bell, but we can't allow them to do that. David and I could keep guard there if you don't mind watching the house with the twins."

Penny looked up from the bread she was buttering.

"I've been thinking about all this, Jon. I feel guilty about it, and although I like the old Major and would like to help him, I'm sure we should be wrong to allow the twins to get mixed up in another scrap. They managed this one without any trouble because they only had to fight one fat boy, but Dale is a very different matter and so might be the tall thin chap who rode off to Rye after messing about in the spinney. A man like Dale is not going to give up trying to get in here just because you and David saw him off this morning. He'll come again. I've been wondering if we ought to telephone the Dolphin and ask Vasson to come and fetch us. We can't go on like this. At first I thought this would be a lovely place for a holiday. Then I had that dream, and now we've had today with all these people including that horrible girl trying to get in here. I don't like it, Jon. I've still got that feeling about this place. Of course we've all got to be indoors as soon as it gets dark, and tomorrow if we haven't heard from the Major I think we ought to go back to Rye. Sorry, but that's how it is."

She stopped buttering bread and looked up at him appealingly with eyes full of tears. "All right, Penny." Jon spoke gently. "We'll do that."

"Thank you," she whispered. "And promise me that you won't leave the grounds for anything. Promise, Jon. None of us must go out unless we're collected by Vasson in the car. David wants to post his letter to Peter but he mustn't go. I'm sure of it. Promise, me, Jon. I'm sure something else is going to happen and we must all keep together."

When they had finished their tea the twins insisted on going back to the fort and Penny volunteered to go with them. "We'll stay until dusk," she said. "It's no use arguing, twins, because we're all going to sleep in the castle tonight and pull up the drawbridge. Meanwhile, if we see anyone acting suspiciously or in our grounds we will pull the alarm bell and one of you boys can come and rescue us. We'll also take Mackie."

David looked a little surprised at the authority with which Penny was telling them all what to do, but Jon nodded to him reassuringly and so he said nothing more.

It was nearly dusk when the alarm bell tinkled. Jon was returning to the kitchen after one of several excursions between the front gate and the fort

where so far the guards had nothing significant to report.

The bell tinkled and then suddenly stopped. Jon turned and ran round to the front of the house where he warned David.

He then raced down through the orchard and saw Mary running towards him.

"Oh Jon," she gasped. "Penny has just driven off in somebody's car."

## 9. Ballinger Again

It was from the moment that Penny saw the woman running distractedly down the canal bank, that the adventure in which they were all involved became really dangerous.

She had been sitting idly on the rampart of the twins' fort when she first heard cries for help. The twins were chattering behind her and there was no traffic on the road except for a parked car which was nothing unusual because people often left their cars to walk under the lime trees along the canal bank. There was no doubt that the woman was in trouble for she stood in front of the car waving her arms and looking wildly round her. Then Penny stood up and heard, faintly, on the evening breeze, "Help! Help!.. my baby... in the water... I can't swim..." The woman must have seen Penny for she ran across the road again shouting for help, and tried to squeeze through the wire fence into the field.

Penny jumped off the rampart and slithered down the stony slope into the nettles below.

"Pull the alarm bell, twins, and tell the boys that I've gone to help that woman. Her baby has fallen in the canal. Stay there until I come."

She forced her way through the undergrowth into the field and saw that the woman was now back on the road and standing by the car. She was wearing dark glasses and seemed to be young and attractive, with hair a more startling red than Penny's

"Quickly, quickly," she called. "She rolled down the bank. We can save her if you're quick... Oh, thank you, my dear. Thank you."

By now Penny was through the wire and running to her across the road.

"Get in the car," the girl begged as she opened both doors. "Quicker this way... Only just a little way up the road."

Penny fell into the trap. As she stumbled into the back of the car, breathless and exhausted from her race down the hill, an old raincoat was flung over her head and cruel hands seized her shoulders thrusting her back against the seat. The car lurched forward as she struggled. Her hands, reaching up, touched a face thick with fuzzy hair and she knew the identity of her captor.

Her nails tore at his face and with a curse Les Dale gripped her wrists. "Stop struggling, you red-headed little devil," he muttered. "Stay still and do as I say and you'll come to no harm. I give you my word I won't hurt you if you be quiet. You can help me and help Major Bolshaw too if you'll only listen and do as I ask."

Penny knew that she could not escape from a moving car and that her only chance would come when it stopped, so she choked back her angry sobs and said, "Take your hands off me, and take this filthy thing off my head. I won't struggle until you've explained yourself."

Les kept his word and she threw the dirty old coat on to the floor of the car. It was dusk now and she was aware that the woman was driving far too fast along narrow lanes. She did not speak even when she saw Penny watching her in the driving mirror.

"Say what you've got to say quickly," Penny said. "And remember that my friends will be looking for me by now. I know they'll tell the police I've been kidnapped, but if you'll take me back to Amorys right away I'll say it was all a mistake."

"Nobody at Amorys can tell the police because the house isn't on the telephone and none of you have got bikes," Les said. "You are all behaving in a most stupid and childish way by trying to keep me out of Amorys. I'm going to tell you why you and your friends will all be very much wiser to go back to Rye in the morning whether Major Bolshaw comes back or not."

"But the Major isn't well. He's in bed at Amorys. We're looking after him," Penny protested.

"Don't trouble to lie," Les said as he fumbled for a cigarette. "We know he is not... Now look here. I'm sorry if I hurt you. You've only got to answer a



few questions, promise to clear off in the morning and you'll come to no harm."

He struck a match and Penny, squeezing herself into the corner of the car as far away from him as possible, was not deceived. His words were fair enough, but there was a cold, cruel look in his eye which terrified her. She knew now that they had all gone too far this time and that she would need all her courage to get out of this mess. And at that moment she had another shock. He had just said that they should all go back to Rye in the morning. *How did he know they lived at Rye?* None of them could possibly have told him. And how could he be so sure that the Major was away?

"I want nothing explained to me and I have nothing to tell you," she said as steadily as she could. "Please take me straight back to Amorys. If you don't I shall inform the police and tell them that you abducted me against my will... I mean it. You can't scare me."

"You little fool," the woman said as she drove into the yard at the side of the Smuggler's Rest. "You're scared stiff and you'd better make up your mind right now that you're going to do *exactly* what you're told. You'll see why in a minute... Get out now and watch her carefully, Les."

Penny looked round cautiously as the car stopped. It was nearly dark and she guessed it was past closing time as there was nobody about. She could see through an uncurtained window into a kitchen and as she watched, an untidy woman crossed the room and peered out at them. Penny wondered if the woman would befriend her if she knew she was being held against her will. But whether she did or not Penny was sure her only chance of escape was likely to be in the next minute or two.

"Get out your side," Les said as he gripped her arm. "Press the handle down... and no funny business. We're going indoors for a little chat."

As she fumbled with the handle, Penny realized that the red-headed woman was getting out on the opposite side so it was now or never.

"I'll get out if you'll open the door," she said to Les. "The handle is stuck or something. I can't move it."

He leaned across her impatiently and she shuddered as his beard touched her face. Then the door opened suddenly as she pressed it with her foot, and with Les slightly off-balance, she wrenched her arm free and slipped out of the car. But, even as she ran out of the yard on to the grass in front of the inn, she knew that her only chance of escape was a passing car, bicycle or indeed any stranger to whom she could appeal. Now she could hear footsteps pounding behind her, and in sudden helpless anger she realized that since they had been in Oxney they had hardly ever met anybody. Never had she known such a deserted, eerie place after dusk. Amorys was isolated and so it seemed was Oxney's only inn. Everything was quiet, and there was nowhere to hide or indeed to run to. Perhaps when she reached the road she would be able to run faster than either of her pursuers? She knew that if she ran south she would come eventually to Amorys. And then she thought of Jon who, she knew, would be fighting mad to find her. If only he would suddenly appear *now*. She knew he would come as soon as he could but how would anyone know where to find her? She was sure that the car had been driven fast to Appledore and then probably round some lanes and then back to here. Perhaps the red-headed woman had deliberately driven a long way round so that the inn would be shut when they arrived?

The footsteps were close now, and in terror of what would happen if they caught her she spurted and reached the road. And then she stumbled and fell. For a few seconds she was conscious only of a stunning blow on her shoulder as it hit the hard road. Then she realized she was being carried by Dale, who was obviously much stronger than he looked. She struggled and when he put a hand over her mouth she bit it. With a curse he dropped her on the grass and now the girl, who had taken off her dark glasses, grabbed her arm and pulled her to her feet.

"Little fool," she said vindictively. "Can't you see sense? If you don't come quietly now I'm going to hit you."

Penny said nothing, having decided to save her strength. Each captor then grasped an arm and led her across the yard, round to the back of the inn and through an open door into a brightly lit stone-flagged passage. She could hear a radio which suddenly blared out as a door opened. A big woman with untidy fair hair and a stupid face stood in the doorway staring at them.

"Help me! *Please help me!*" Penny cried. "Make them let me go. They've forced me to come with them."

The woman made no answer and shut the door as the girl struck Penny hard across the face with her open hand. She gasped with the pain and surprise but did not cry out. All she said was, "You will be sorry for that... Take your hands off me and I'll come with you. I know I can't escape until my friends and the police come for me."

Dale released her arm and said to his companion, "You shouldn't have done that." The woman shrugged and as Les led the way upstairs, she walked behind Penny so there was no chance of running back the way they had come. Then Les opened the door of the sitting room in the front of the house and pushed Penny towards a big, ungainly woman who was sitting at a table in the window doing a crossword. She looked up and Penny felt a shiver of fear trickle down her spine. She was reminded of somebody else she had met more than once and hoped never to meet again - the wicked woman called Ballinger, and on another occasion Madam Christabel. She was alike and yet not alike. Not as stout perhaps as the Ballinger and rather better dressed. She was wearing thick-lensed spectacles as the other had done but her white hair was blue-rinsed. Penny, in that first quick, fearful glance also noticed that this woman was wearing a wedding ring. She looked quickly at Penny without change of expression and then at Les Dale, while the girl closed the door and stood just inside with her dark glasses on again.

"Where are the others?" she said quietly. "Not still in possession I trust? Is this the best you can do?"

"She's been a lot of trouble, Aunt Em, but I told her that if she answers our questions and promises to persuade the other kids to clear out in the morning, none of them will come to any harm."

"Very good of you, I'm sure. Two of you should have been able to manage one schoolgirl. Who hit her?"

Les nodded towards his fiancée still standing by the door.

"She did. The kid shouted for help to Mrs. Crump. She'd been warned so she got what was coming to her. That's all," and then to Penny, "This is Mrs. Cartwright. Behave yourself and answer our questions and you'll be O.K. - you and your friends, I mean. Nobody is going to hurt you now."

Penny could not answer. She was feeling sick, there was a roaring in her ears and the room seemed to be tilting from side to side. Her forehead was damp with perspiration and with horror she realized that she was going to faint.

From far away she heard Mrs Cartwright saying, "Get her a chair, you fool. Give her a drink."

Somebody pulled her into a seat and then, with a hand on her neck, forced her head between her knees. The roaring faded and as she looked up the girl flung a glass of water in her face. Penny spluttered and sat up as the nausea faded.

"Are you feeling better?" Mrs Cartwright asked. "Would you like a drink? There is no need for us to keep you long. We only want you to answer a few questions, give us a promise and then you can go back to Amorys until tomorrow morning. Now speak up so that we can end this unpleasant interview."

Penny's wits and courage were now returning. She knew she was among enemies and Mrs. Cartwright puzzled her. She was a little like the Ballinger, but the latter had always had a harsh, loud voice while this woman was almost difficult to hear. Anyway why had she suddenly turned up at the inn? And why had the Dogkicker, who was now standing by the window nibbling his nails, called her "Aunt Em"?

Penny took a deep breath, sat up in her chair and said:

"You have no right to keep me here. I am not going to answer your questions and I will give you no promises except that you will all be sorry that you kept me here against my will. I demand to be taken back now to Amorys."

This brave speech was received in silence, and was only broken by the tapping of Mrs. Cartwright's pencil irritably on the table. Eventually she said, "This is ridiculous. Where is Major Bolshaw and when will he be back? Don't trouble to lie. We know he is not in the house. He must have told you when he would be coming back after he got the telegram. When did he go? And what time tomorrow will he return?"

Penny shook her head. She was wondering how they knew that the Major had received a telegram. *Unless, of course, they had sent it to get him out of the way.* And if this was so, they presumably did not know that he had gone hours before the telegram arrived and that he really had gone to London. That is, of course, if the Major was telling the truth. Perhaps he had fled the country and they were never going to see him again? So she shook her head and said nothing, praying that her friends would come for her soon.

Then all three of them fired questions at her. They surrounded her, and when she put her hands over her ears, Dale threatened to tie her hands together behind her back. Why were they all staying at Amorys? Had Bolshaw said anything to them about Roman treasure? Had he told them how long he would be away?

For a moment she wondered whether she could make up a story which would deceive them. She was now certain that they intended to get into Amorys tonight, although what the fat woman was doing here it was impossible to guess. It was odd too that the girl had not spoken to the older woman since she had come into the room.

So she tried to comfort herself by thinking about Jon and how wonderful he had been after he had rescued her from the canal. She thought too about the other Lone Piners who she was sure would be searching for her now.

"I told you I'm not going to answer your questions," she said firmly. "You're wasting your time and it's no use shouting at me. Let me go now, please."

The fat woman put her pencil on the table and stood up. There was something menacing about the authority in her smooth, quiet voice.

"This is ridiculous," she began. "Quite ridiculous and nobody is going to do any more shouting at you, my dear. Although you are pretending to be brave you have good reason to be frightened. I am a determined woman, and although I regret the way in which you have been treated this evening you were foolish to try and run away. I want you to understand that I shall dislike hurting you but I intend to have my own way in this matter and this is what you are going to do."

She paused, and again Penny felt the ominous trickle of fear and the thudding of her heart in a long silence.

"This is what you will do," her persecutor continued. "You will sit down here and write a letter to your friends at Amorys. You will tell them that you want them to come at once to the Smuggler's Rest, because you have found Major Bolshaw who has made a most important discovery. You will explain that you cannot say more in this letter and that you and the Major are waiting for them all and that they must come immediately... Come here, girl. Sit down and write now."

Penny held her chin high. "I won't write lies and anyway that is such a stupid lie that my friends wouldn't believe it."

She heard Les's footsteps behind her and turned to face him. Oddly enough she was no longer afraid of him, realizing that he was no longer giving the orders.

"Very well," the woman said as she sat down again. "We will write a brief note which Master George Crump will take on his bicycle to Amorys, saying that you have been knocked down by a car and seriously injured and that your friends must all come at once. I shall word this letter in such a way that they will be sent off on a wild goose chase while you are locked up here."

She paused, and then her voice suddenly became harsher.

"I shall be looking after you, my girl. I shall enjoy it and before the night is out I think you'll be talking to me."

Then she spoke to the young woman in dark glasses who was still standing by the door.

"There was a lanky boy with spectacles. What was his name? Ah yes - Jonathan Warrender. I think he'll talk when he knows we're looking after this little spitfire. The end of the chase for wild geese must not be too far away. We must be able to reach them when we want them."

Then of course Penny knew. She felt the blood drain from her face and prayed that they would not notice. This *was* the Ballinger and the girl behind her was her niece Valerie. How else would they know about Jon? How else would they know that they lived in Rye? The Ballinger was different of course, but she could not disguise her shortsighted eyes although she had certainly cultivated a different voice. The Ballinger and Valerie had no love for the Lone Piners although it was incredible that their paths should have crossed again. Poor Penny! She knew that this woman was a criminal and that she would not be here unless there was a chance of some easy money. She looked round fearfully, but of course there was no chance of escape. Valerie, still wearing her dark specs - obviously afraid that Penny would recognize her - was still in front of the door while Les had moved up to her elbow.

"Write the note now, my dear," he said. "That would be best. No trouble for you or your friends then. You won't be hurt. We only want you all to be sensible. Bolshaw can't possibly mean anything to you and we have to pursue some investigations at Amorys immediately. Why don't you be sensible?"

She was desperately afraid now, and knew that she would probably weaken if they threatened Jon. Then she realized that they could not yet be sure that she had recognized them. Valerie was staring at her calculatingly, but she had not yet removed her dark spectacles so perhaps it would be best to go on pretending that she did not know who they were.

"It's no use," she said as bravely as she could. "You all know you're in the wrong to threaten me and if you hurt me you'll only be sorry later. I'm not going to write that note and even if you're so absolutely filthy as to write and say that I've had an accident I'm sure they won't believe you. I'm sure

that one of them at least has gone out to find a telephone and I know that the police are probably on their way, so you might just as well let me go now."

These were courageous words but they were of no use.

"Very well," Les said. "You've had your chance. We'll have to tie you up and leave you in the care of Mrs. Cartwright. There's an empty room next to Granpa's and I suppose I'd better go first and see how *he's* getting on. He'll be a fool if he doesn't come in with us now. His share of anything we find - or of what we let him have - could be more than what he's asking us for his information."

Then he turned suddenly on Penny.

"Where's that old fool Bolshaw?"

She fell into the trap.

"Where you'll never find him," she blustered and then, too late, realized that she had told them that he was not at Amorys. Her hand flew to her mouth as the three conspirators looked at each other in triumph.

Then, before any of them spoke there was a crash of breaking glass as a big stone crashed through the window. In a flash Penny was across the room and shouting to whoever was standing below.

"Help me, please. Help! I'm a prisoner up here. Please, please help me!"

Les dragged her away from the window as Valerie switched out the light. But Penny, as she fought and struggled, did not care. She knew who had thrown the stone through the lighted window just because there was a chance that she might be there. She knew because she had heard Jon's triumphant shout.

"Hold on, Newpenny. We're on our way."



## 10. The Rescue

Jon was standing by the back door when he heard the tinkle of the alarm bell in the kitchen. It was only a tinkle, and when he felt the string which ran through the open window it was slack in his hand, and he realized that it had broken at its first pull.

He ran round to the front of the house where David was mooching about on the drive.

"One of them has pulled the alarm," Jon shouted. "Stay on guard here while I run down and see what's happened."

He met Mary, struggling for breath and stumbling through the orchard.

"Oh, Jon! she gasped. "Penny has driven off in somebody's car. A woman called out that her baby had fallen in the canal and Penny went to help her and - Jon, you're hurting me!"

He had grabbed her by the shoulders.

"You're not playing a stupid game, are you, Mary?... I'm sorry. Of course you're not. Here's Dickie. Now tell me everything and don't interrupt each other. You first Dickie - and be quick."

"I wouldn't stay down there by myself. Mary said we must tell you right away after the car drove off. It went Appledore way. We think it was all lies, Jon. About the woman's baby in the canal, I mean. I think they've got Penny. That filthy Dogkicker, I mean. Penny ran off to help the woman as soon as she called out. We couldn't stop her, Jon. Honestly we couldn't."

"All right, Dickie. I know you couldn't. We all know that if somebody called on Penny for help she'd go at once. *It wasn't your fault*. Did you see the woman and what was she like?"

"It was nearly dark," Mary said. "She was young and I think she was wearing dark glasses. She was waving her arms and yelling about her baby.

What shall we do?"

"One more question. Was there anybody else in the car? A driver, I mean. Did the woman get in the back with Penny?"

Dickie shook his head. "No. It all happened quickly, but I *think* Penny got in the back and the woman drove off."

"Right," Jon said. "We'll tell David and then I'm going to the Smuggler's Rest to see if they've taken her there. Where's your dog?"

"Macbeth is here." Mary said coldly, "He's waiting for orders... And here's David coming. He'll know what to do."

"*David* will know what to do!" Jon snapped. "I'm the one who's going to decide what to do... Nice of you to turn up, David. Those devils have got Penny. I'm going after her. Come up to the house."

David did not argue. Jon's voice was shaking with rage and when they switched on the light in the kitchen they saw that he was very upset.

"Sorry about this," David said quietly. "Don't waste time talking if there's something we can do now. What do you suggest?"

Jon gave him a grateful look.

"I'm going off to the inn now. The twins will tell you about it, but maybe you had better go down to the canal first just to see if the car stopped farther along the road and the woman was telling the truth about a baby. I bet she's a liar. They've tricked us. They've been trying to get in here all day while we've been playing about with ramparts and alarm bells. I'm sorry, David. We brought you here after getting mixed up with old Bolshaw... Now I'm going. You can't leave the twins here alone so you'd better lock up the house front and back and chance whether anybody gets in. That doesn't matter now. I don't care about Roman treasure or the mad Major and I'm going to that pub whether you follow or not... But I suppose you'd better telephone my mother at the Dolphin and give the police some details of the car and that woman... Come along as soon as you can, and if I don't have any luck

I'll find a telephone box at Wittersham or somewhere and telephone the police myself just to make sure."

And with that he ran off down the drive. As he was opening the gate, he remembered that he had not asked David whether he had heard or seen a car drive up the lane from the road. But of course he would have mentioned it if he had. He had been watching the front of the house, and it was unlikely that Penny's abductors, if they were on their way to the inn, would be so silly as to pass the gate of Amorys. But would it not be almost as silly to take her to the Smuggler's Rest? Perhaps he was now doing exactly as they expected him to do? Perhaps Penny was now in Hythe or Folkstone while they were all searching the more obvious places? And what did they want of her?

While torturing himself with such thoughts Jon ran up the lane at a steady trot, hastening towards the inn which, in so short a time, had exerted such an evil influence over their affairs. It was dark between the hedgerows and the sky was already spangled with stars as night began to fall. Soon the moon would be up. All was quiet too and the silence was broken only occasionally by the strange "chur-ring" of a nightjar and then the cry of a hunting owl. He ran a quarter of a mile before slowing to a walk. He thought of nobody but Penny. It seemed incredible that it was only days since he had met her at the station and had had a silly squabble which was really his fault because he had been clumsy. He remembered vividly how she had come out of the Dolphin and stood before him in her green dress, her hands behind her back, and asked him if she would do. He remembered her sense of fun, her quick temper and her even quicker wit, her loyalty and her courage and the way in which she had impulsively decided to help the old Major who had now deserted them. And it was only last night that she had organized the banquet, then gone out with the twins in the middle of the night to lay her ghost in spite of the fact that she was scared of Amorys because it was full of ghosts. So many impetuous, tender and affectionate little gestures, the very remembrance of which hurt because he knew that wherever she was or whatever was happening to her she would be trusting him to come to her.

He was at the foot of a little hill between high hedges now and just as he began to run again he saw, rushing silently towards him, almost as if airborne, an extraordinary figure. He stepped back into the shadows and then realized that the apparition was a tall, thin figure on a bicycle without lamps. With a swish of tyres it swept past him, but all he glimpsed was the white blur of a face surmounted by a sort of helmet. Before he could call out the figure had disappeared and Jon was sure it was on its way to Amorys and might well be the man chased by Penny, the twins and Macbeth through the coppice last night. The man who had dropped the lamp and the pick. The mysterious man who Penny had thought might be the ghost of a Roman soldier.

There was nothing that Jon could do about him now even had he wanted to, so he ran forward again and from the crest of the rise saw the gleam of lighted windows about a quarter of a mile ahead and guessed correctly that this was the Smuggler's Rest. When he was near enough to recognize it, he slowed down and walked in the shadow of the hedge.

The moon was up now and it was light enough to see that the inn was closed. The lighted windows he had seen were on the first floor above the door to the bar. They were closed but he was sure that he could hear the murmur of voices.

He waited for a moment or two to recover his breath and collect his thoughts. He knew that if Penny was here he would need all his wits and a cool head. As the curtains were not drawn across the upstairs windows he realized that if he walked across the moonlit grass he would be easily seen by anyone looking out. He ran silently into the yard at the side of the inn and nearly bumped into a parked car.

He hurried round to the back, and cautiously looked through another uncurtained window into a big kitchen, where a blowsy-looking woman and the fat grocer's boy were watching television. The sound was at full blast and they looked as if nothing would disturb them.

No other windows showed any light, but the moon was now high enough for Jon to see that the yard was littered with crates of empty beer bottles and other rubbish. He tried the back door but that, rather surprisingly, was

locked. Then his luck changed for at the side of a shed, in a bed of nettles, he found a short ladder. It was not too heavy to carry. The only way in which he could discover whether it would reach the first floor windows in the front of the house was to try. He knew there was a risk of being seen by anybody on the road, but he was now in the mood to take any risk to discover whether Penny was a prisoner in this house. The car parked in the shadows might well be the car into which Penny was enticed by the young woman who had so shamelessly appealed to her for help.

In his anxiety, he hardly felt the weight of the ladder, but he had some anxious moments when he had to duck under the kitchen window and some more when, feeling conspicuous and defenceless, he set the ladder against the wall of the inn. But thankfully he realized that the top rung rested about three feet below the sill of the window. Without even looking behind him he climbed up and carefully raised his head until he could see into the room. His heart jumped when he saw Penny only a few yards away from him. She was standing in front of a table at which a plump woman with blue-tinted hair was sitting with her back to him. Standing close to Penny was Les Dale, but as the windows were closed Jon could not hear what he was saying. With her back to the door was a young, redheaded woman wearing dark spectacles, who surely must have been the one seen by the twins enticing Penny into the car. Now he knew that his suspicions were correct.

Penny had been deliberately and cunningly kidnapped and was now being cross-questioned and bullied. She was facing her tormentors with her usual courage and Jon wished that he knew the identity of the plump woman. He was also puzzled by the girl in the dark glasses who vaguely reminded him of somebody he had once known. All this he saw in seconds, but realizing he could do nothing by himself he had the sense to climb down and hide the ladder in some long grass at the other side of the inn. With any luck David and the twins should now be on their way, but before he ran to meet them it occurred to Jon that Dale's car could be put out of action. Jon had an enquiring mind, and when learning to drive he had been shown by Fred Vasson how to immobilize a car by removing the distributor arm. Dale's car, which was about the same vintage as their own was no trouble, and although it was difficult to open the bonnet, he soon had the arm in his pocket. He then ran back to the front of the inn and looked first down the

moonlit road, hoping for a sight of the Mortons, then up at the windows of Penny's prison and knew that whatever else happened she must know that help was coming. He did not stop to reason, but searched until he found a big flint which he flung at the lighted window. As the glass tinkled to the ground he heard Penny shout for help, "I'm a prisoner up here. Please, please help me!"

With a yell of triumph Jon shouted, "Hold on, Newpenny. We're on our way," and then raced into the shadows at the side of the house as the light in the room above was switched off. Now that she knew help was near and that he had not failed her, he was sure that she would face almost anything. But although he had given her courage, he had also given the game away to their enemies, although there were two things they did not know - first that at present he was alone and secondly that the ladder, which he had now hidden, had enabled him to discover their strength. Then he heard the window being opened and as more glass fell he went down on his knees, crawled to the corner of the house and looked up cautiously. The front of the inn was in shadow, but there was enough moonlight for him to see the young woman who had been guarding the door, lean from the window. As he watched he saw her take off the dark glasses and look round for him, he again had the feeling that he had either seen her before or that she reminded him of somebody he had once known.

He could just hear voices from the room, and then the girl disappeared as if they had realized that he might be watching with another stone in his hand. As there was nothing else to see, Jon crawled back into hiding, straining his ears to catch the sound of the hurrying footsteps of his friends. He heard neither, and realizing that he could not do much to help Penny by himself, he waited for a few more minutes in case they were still watching. Then keeping in the shadows, he ran quietly out to the road and turned south.

He heard the others before he saw them, but as they were too far from the inn to be heard this did not matter.

"Stop here and get your breath back," Jon told them. "I've found her and she knows we're on the way." Quickly he told them everything, including the fact that the enemy's car was immobilized.

"This could be rough stuff, Jon. We've got to get into the house to get Penny out," David said. "We haven't telephoned Rye because we didn't pass a call box. I'm wondering whether we ought to take the twins into this, and whether you'd like one of us to go on to Wittersham to find a telephone or a policeman?... Now don't fly into a rage. I know you want to get Penny *right now* and so do we, but let's just first consider the best way to rescue her."

"You can stay here and talk if you like, but I'm going back to get Penny and if I know the twins they'll want to be with us... Sorry, David. I know that I'm rattled, but I saw her through the window. She was standing up and facing the lot of them and there was a mark on her face where one of them had hit her. We've got to think of a way to get into the house but I'm sure we'll manage it. Did you meet what looked like a ghost on a bike? Tall, thin chap with a helmet of some sort. No lights on the bike. Could be Penny's ghost. And could be the old man from the inn. I bet he was on his way to Amorys."

But the Mortons had not seen him, and David muttered that the twins were talking so hard that anyone approaching on a bicycle could have heard them long before they were in sight and hidden behind a hedge. Neither had Macbeth given a warning.

"Just a ghost or were you seeing things which weren't even ghosts, if you know what I mean," Dickie said. "Let's go and get Penny. We'll have an idea what to do when we get there."

There were now no lights in any of the windows in the front of the inn and the place looked deserted when they arrived.

"A woman and the fat boy were in the kitchen watching the telly, but the back door was locked," Jon whispered. "They've probably moved Penny because I broke the window. When we get her I'll drive us all back to Amorys - or to Rye - in Dale's car. Follow me and don't make a sound or step out into the moonlight. We'll soon want Mackie, Mary, but please keep him quiet."

Keeping in the shadows they crept into the yard at the side of the house. The car was still there and the light was on in the kitchen although there

was no sound now from the television. Jon signed to them to keep back while he looked cautiously through the window. The room was empty and he could see through the open door into the passage. Surely they were not *all* upstairs torturing Penny? For a moment he forgot his caution and stalked round to try the back door. It was still locked. As they stood in silence looking to Jon, he pointed up at the roof in which were two dormer windows close together. One was lit and the other in darkness, but as they watched a light was switched on behind the latter, and, to their surprise, they saw George Crump lean out.

"Come quick, Mum," the boy said. "Granpa's got out. 'E's gone. The winder's open. 'E must 'ave got out and slid down the roof. It's not much of a drop. I done it once."

Mary was now crouched on the ground clutching Macbeth. None of them dare move away from the walls of the house in case they were seen, but Jon knew that luck was with them when Mrs. Crump, obviously leaning from the window with her well-beloved, was heard to say, "Now there'll be trouble, Georgie boy. Run down and see whether his bike has gone from the shed or whether he's broken his neck."

"He hasn't done that," Jon whispered. "I was here less than an hour ago. Granpa was the ghost on the bike and I bet he's having the time of his life now at Amorys... Now for George. Get him, David, tie him up and shove him in that shed. Soon as he opens this door I'm going in. I'll shout if I want help, but you keep George hidden as a hostage if you like. He's all yours now and here he comes."

They heard footsteps in the passage, heavy breathing, the turning of the key in the lock, and then the unfortunate George Crump stepped out to his last encounter with the Lone Piners. They fell upon the boy, threw him on the ground, and gagged him by pushing a handkerchief into his mouth. As Jon stepped over the threshold he saw, with satisfaction, that David had hauled George to his feet and was dragging him without a struggle towards the shed. The twins and Macbeth were in close attendance.

Jon then turned to see Mrs. Crump standing by the kitchen door staring at him in astonishment. She opened her mouth to shout a warning but Jon was



in no mood for argument - or indeed for courtesy. He pushed her into the kitchen, slammed the door and locked it and ran upstairs two at a time. The light on the landing showed him another narrow flight of stairs leading to a top floor. He stood for a moment listening. There was a hubbub coming from the kitchen, but no sound from behind the closed doors on this landing, and he remembered that the window from which George had been looking was obviously that of an attic as it jutted out from the roof. The window next to it might well be where they were keeping Penny a prisoner.

He ran up the next flight and knew that he had found her. The door of one attic was open, but from behind the other which was closed he heard Penny shout defiantly, "No, I will *not*... I know you now. Your real name is Ballinger." Then there was the sound of a blow and a scream from Penny that ended in a sob.

Jon protested later that he did not remember much of what really happened next and neither Penny nor he ever talked about it to the others, although there were a few moments that they never forgot.

This is what did happen. Jon, in a cold rage that kept his head clear, threw back the door. The attic, furnished only with an old trunk under the uncurtained window and two cheap, kitchen-type chairs, was lit by a dim, unshaded bulb. Penny was tied to one of the chairs in the middle of the room with the Ballinger standing over her. Her face was deathly white except for a red weal across one cheek, but when she saw Jon standing in the doorway her eyes lit up, and she bowed her head almost as if she knew she would not have to fight any more.

Valerie, who was standing behind Penny's chair, stared at Jon as if he was a ghost. The Ballinger turned slowly, as Dale, who had been standing beside Penny, cursed and was at Jon almost before the latter had taken his eyes from her. But between them was the empty chair, and even as Jon dodged the other's rush he grabbed the only weapon in the room and swung it off the floor. Les swerved and then as Jon raised the chair he kicked him on the kneecap so that he cried out in sudden pain. Penny screamed and as Jon crashed the chair down on to Dale's head and shoulders he realized that Valerie, her hands raised as if to scratch his face, was coming to her beloved's rescue. But she was too late, for Dale had collapsed in a crumpled

heap on the floor and the Ballinger was already through the door. Jon, holding the chair before him, forced Valerie to follow her and realized that the older woman seemed to have had enough and was prepared to escape with Valerie leaving the luckless Les to his fate.

The house was now in pandemonium. Mrs. Crump was shouting and banging on the kitchen door, Macbeth was barking furiously as he confronted the Ballinger and Valerie on the stairs, and the twins, presumably now on the first floor landing were whooping with triumph.

But Jon, after one glance at the groaning Les, had no eyes for anybody but Penny. He dropped the chair, took a knife from his pocket and cut the cord which bound her wrists. Penny was crying and laughing all at once. He looked at her affectionately and then noticed her eyes widen with fear at something she saw over his shoulder. Instinctively he pulled her sideways and they fell to the floor as Dale staggered forward and swung the other chair down at them. Jon's quick reaction saved them. He was on his feet in a flash and struggling for possession of the chair as he drove Dale out on to the landing. David came racing up the stairs to the rescue.

"Penny O.K. Jon?" he shouted above the pandemonium. "You don't want what you've got there, do you? Throw him down and we'll lock him in with the others."

So Jon, feeling crazily on top of the world, wrenched the remains of the chair from Dale and pushed him down the stairs to David who stood on one side and helped him on his way. There was no fight left in Dale now. He was battered and bruised and his nose was bleeding. The hated little black devil of a dog was snapping at his ankles, and he seemed to be surrounded by twins and tough young men who had made fools of them all. The lanky fair one with the specs was holding him up against the door of the sitting room now while another, with a happy grin on his face, unlocked it.

"O.K. Jon!" David said. "Shove him in when I turn the handle. Now!" And Les was pushed in and the door locked behind him.

Then Jon turned and saw Penny just behind him being hugged by the twins. And so the Lone Piners retired from the Smuggler's Rest in triumph,

leaving the crooks locked in their own room, Mrs. Crump still yelling in the kitchen and young George roaring with shame in the woodshed.

Jon led the way out into the moonlit yard with his arm round Penny, David locked the back door behind them and threw the key away, and then the twins and Macbeth got into the back seat of Dale's car. Jon replaced the distributor arm and, to his surprise and satisfaction started the engine with the ignition key which had been left in the car.

"Amorys first, or straight back to Rye?" he asked Penny who was shivering on the seat beside him.

"Amorys, please Jon. Whatever we do tomorrow we must go back there tonight. Anyway I'm feeling better."

Jon nodded and drove out into the moonlight in front of the inn. Les was shouting and cursing from the broken window so Jon sounded the horn derisively as he drove onto the road. David noticed with amusement that he did not even ask anybody else what they wanted to do. This was Jon's day.

Penny had her eyes closed and Jon was anxiously watching the road, so it was David who first noticed the reflection of flames in the sky ahead of them.

"Look, Jon! There's a big fire ahead. See it? It's where Amorys is. You'd better hurry!"

As Jon trod on the accelerator David wound down the window. The wind from the sea brought the frightening smell of smoke.

## 11. Treasure at Amorys

With some misgivings, Jon increased the speed of Dale's old car as they all saw sparks from the fire flying up into the sky. Even the twins were awed into silence by the thought that Amorys was burning down while they had been left in charge during the Major's absence.

"It can't be the house," David said. "I locked both doors and closed the windows before we left. There's no gas and I'm sure I switched off the lights. Nobody would be such a fool as to break in and set the place alight."

Jon gritted his teeth as the car lurched dangerously round a bend.

"I think it's something to do with that old chap in a helmet," he said. "Old Granpa from the inn. Maybe he's a fire maniac!"

*"Please slow down, Jon," Penny pleaded. "Let's find out the worst, and if it is the house then we must send for the fire brigade and go home to Rye. This really hasn't been our lucky day."*

But Penny was only a few hours out for the luck was turning their way at last.

At the next corner, which Jon took with greater care, David leaned from the open window and shouted, "I can see now. It's not the house. It's the wood and the flames are dying down... Go easy, Jon. You're nearly there and I know I closed the gate."

It was open now and Jon drove in confidently.

"Open up the house first, David," he suggested. "We'd better make sure that nobody has broken in... What about you, Newpenny? How about a nice cup of tea in bed or something?"

While David was unlocking the front door the twins ran off with Macbeth towards the fire. Jon went round to the other side of the car and opened the door.

"I wasn't trying to be funny," he said quietly. "Shouldn't you go to bed and take some aspirin? I'll tell you something, Penny. You're not only the nicest and prettiest girl I'm ever likely to know but you're the bravest. How do you feel now?"

She took his hand and held it for a few moments. Her face was burning.

"It's too dark for you to see, Jon, but I'm blushing. I don't feel too bad now. My head aches but I'm happy and I don't much care what happens, although I want everything to go well for the Major wherever he is. And I want to come with you, please Jon. We shall all have to go to bed soon for it must be nearly midnight... Here comes David."

David reported that the house was as he had left it and that the Major had not returned.

"I've locked up again," he went on. "We'd better find the twins and see if we can do anything about the fire."

They met them in the orchard.

"There's a mad old man with a helmet on his head prancing about in the ashes of what was once our sinister little wood," Dickie explained. "He really seems crackers."

"But not hostile," Mary added. "He was quite pleased to see us. Quite a nice change for us to meet intelligent people which I am sure you will understand. I asked him what he was doing and he said he was burning the copse."

"Which we could see for ourselves," Dickie added. "You'd all better come."

They found Granpa Crump standing in the ashes at the edge of the still smouldering coppice. He did not look at all like a ghost of a Roman soldier, although he had managed to get a miner's helmet from somewhere. When Jon said, "What are you doing here? These are private grounds. You're trespassing and you've started a fire," he turned and looked at them without surprise. His face was pale and streaked with ashes and there was, as Dickie

had said, a wild look in his eyes. Penny decided that there was no harm in him and that he was really just a pathetic old man.

"Why don't you come indoors and tell us all about it, Mr. Crump?" she said suddenly. "Come and tell us what you're looking for. You can't do anything here and we know that you were locked into an attic in your own house."

"Arr! That's right. That's what they did and I'll get 'em for it. I come down the roof and as soon as this cools down a bit we'll go in and find the treasure 'ouse... *But we've got to get there first.* I burned this down to find the old well. That's where it is."

David took the old man's arm and led him towards the house. "We'll get there first, Granpa. Don't you worry. The others who locked you up are all locked in the Smuggler's Rest themselves. They won't come here tonight and we've got their car."

He followed them like a lamb, and although by now the twins were practically walking in their sleep and Penny was not much better, they managed to make some tea and take it into the sitting room.

The twins and Macbeth sat on the hearthrug and Penny sat between David and Jon on the sofa. Granpa also was exhausted, but he sucked up his tea in loud gulps and suddenly said, "I wants the Major and I reckon he wants me. I'll sell him what I know about this treasure 'ouse for five hundred quid. I'll settle for that. Where's old Major? I reckon 'e don't know 'e's living on a goldmine."

Jon reminded him again that he was trespassing and that unless he did as he was told they would take him back to the inn in the car.

"Arrr!" the old man said as he passed his cup over for more tea. "So old Major b'aint 'ere? They said 'e'd gone away." Then in three gulps he finished his second cup and went on, "Much obliged I'm sure. I'll be away now to find that old well."

"You'll do nothing of the sort, Granpa," David said firmly. "You're too tired to do any more tonight anyway, and we're not going to let you go. We'll all

decide what to do in the morning and we're going to stop here with you, aren't we Jon?"

Jon nodded, wondering how they were going to stay awake. The twins were already asleep against a chair and Penny, with her head on his shoulder had her eyes closed blissfully. There seemed no reason to disturb her.

<"You're better off here than at the Smuggler's," Jon said. "When your daughter-in-law, your charming grandson and your three delightful guests manage to escape I'm sure they'll all be very anti-Granpa. You're safer here, and tomorrow when the fire is out you'll take us out to this well. See what we mean?"

Rather surprisingly Granpa did. He just said "Arrr!" settled back in his chair and was soon snoring.

David tiptoed to the door, locked it and put the key in his pocket. "Doesn't matter now if we all sleep," he whispered. "Or shall we go up to bed and lock the old villain in here. The twins and that girl ought to be in bed."

Penny sat up indignantly.

"How dare you call me 'that girl', David? I heard you - I was just resting for a few minutes. I think we should all stay down here tonight, although you big strong boys will have to lift the twins on to this sofa. I'm going upstairs to bathe my face, tidy up a bit and take some aspirin. I'll be back."

David threw Jon the key as the latter got up to unlock the door. He went out into the hall with Penny who turned on the bottom stair.

"You've been a sort of hero today, haven't you, Jonathan? You really did rescue me and the best 'thank you' I can say is to tell you that I knew you'd come. And thank goodness you came when you did. I've never seen you fighting mad before and it was all rather exciting... I like you very, very much," and she turned and ran upstairs.

"Don't be long," he called after her and walked back to the sitting room in a daze. He did not care much for the way in which David grinned at him but

had hardly settled in a chair before Macbeth sat up, pricked his ears and barked. David ran to the window and was just drawing back the curtains when Penny flung back the door which Jon had not re-locked.

"There's a big car outside," she gasped. "I saw it from the bathroom window. Two men getting out. What shall we do?"

The twins were on their feet now and rubbing their eyes, but Granpa's snores were getting louder and louder.

"Lock him in here," Jon said. "I'll guard the hall and you watch the back door, David. Penny, take the twins in the kitchen."

By the time they had locked Granpa in and were in the hall Macbeth was barking on the front door mat.

"What did the men look like?" Jon snapped at Penny. "Did you recognize them? Was one of them Dale?"

Before she could answer they heard, to their amazement, the sound of a key in the lock and then the front door opened and Major Bolshaw stepped over his own threshold. He stooped to pat Mackie who stopped barking and fawned upon him.

"And what's going on here?" he asked. "Why are you not all in bed? Anything wrong?"

"Not really sir," Jon replied. "A lot has happened and we're pleased to see you."

Something had happened to their Major. He looked altogether more confident as he turned to a tall man standing behind him.

"Forgive me, Brown. Please come in. I have told you about my young friends but it seems as if some of them are rather the worse for wear. Are you hurt, Penelope? Surely your face is bruised?"

"It's a long story we have to tell you," she said. "Would you and Mr. Brown like some tea? We've had some but could drink more. We've got a prisoner -



or a hostage - locked up in your sitting room."

The stranger stepped into the hall and closed the door. He smiled at the Lone Piners and they liked him. He was nearly bald, had spectacles that were invariably slipping down his nose, and wore a suit of baggy brown tweeds with a bow tie. His blue eyes flickered over them and he gave another very special smile to the twins. Then he glanced at his host.

"Perhaps we could have the story *and* tea *and* the prisoner. I congratulate you on your friends, Major, but I suppose we must have some sleep before getting to work early in the morning."

"Come into the kitchen," Penny suggested. "We'll tell you everything there. We've got Granpa Crump of the Smuggler's Rest as a prisoner. He's just burned your copse down and for five hundred quid he'll show you the way to a 'treasure 'ouse', in your grounds. Now may we know who Mr. Brown is?"

With apologies, the Major explained that his guest was really Professor Brown from the British Museum and that he was an expert on Roman history in Britain. The Professor was also the friend he felt should be consulted when he realized that there really did seem a chance of Roman remains on his land.

So Penny made more tea and, after checking that Granpa was still snoring in solitude in the sitting room, they sat around the kitchen table and told their story without interrupting each other too often.

Both men were obviously appalled by what had happened, and when the Major heard about Penny's ordeal he paced up and down his kitchen, almost overcome by remorse at leaving them exposed to such villainy. Then Dickie fell asleep again and the Major insisted that they should all go to bed without delay.

"The Professor and I have a lot to discuss and of course we shall have plenty to say to old Crump. We will look after him and I give you my word that you shall all be with us in the morning for it seems that there is

something to discover... Thank you all again and God bless you... Now off you go."

And off they went for not only was there nothing to argue about but they were all so tired that they could hardly say "Goodnight".

\* \* \*

Penny was wakened reluctantly by an insistent tapping on her door. She had no remembrance even of undressing or getting into bed. She had slept dreamlessly and thankfully for about six hours and would have liked to sleep another six. Why couldn't she be left alone? The tapping changed to a heavy thumping and she heard Jon's voice, "*Wake up, Penny!* It's me, Jon. Are you all right?"

In a sudden fury she got out of bed, struggled into her dressing-gown, stumbled over to the door and opened it.

"Why can't you *shut up*, Jon? Can't you even let me have my sleep out? I don't care what's happened and I'm jolly well going back to bed. I s'pose you want us girls to cook your breakfast again?"

Jon, wearing a sweater and slacks blinked at her in surprise. There was no doubt that she was furious and he was shocked to see that her face was badly bruised where the Ballinger had struck her.

"Now please go away," she went on. "You'll wake Mary up next and she deserves a good sleep if anybody does."

"I'm sorry," Jon said. "I thought you'd want to be in on this with us. Those three men have gone off through the orchard with spades and ropes and things. We're sure they're up to something and we're sure we ought to be there with them. This is as much our show as theirs really. Dickie is awake now and is coming with David and me. We just thought you'd like to come too."

"Well!" she gasped. "All that fuss instead of telling me right away! Why didn't you tell me before? Wait downstairs for us. We'll be about three

minutes," and she closed the door in his face after giving him a dazzling smile that sent him downstairs whistling.

Five minutes later they all, including Macbeth, met in the kitchen.

"They promised to call us if they were going after anything," David said. "It was just lucky that I was awake and heard them talking outside. If they're in what is left of the copse we'll have to wear our thickest shoes because the ashes will still be hot."

"But Mackie?" Mary wailed. "He'll burn his feet. What shall we do with him? I haven't got time to make him four boots."

After some argument poor Macbeth was left in the kitchen to guard the house, and his wails of anguish at being parted from his loved ones followed them as they ran down through the orchard.

The copse had disappeared, and only the charred trunks and branches of the bigger trees stood up like gaunt skeletons against the pale blue of the morning sky. The breeze from the Marsh brought nothing but the smell of burning wood while a haze of smoke still hung over the remains of the sinister little coppice that was about to give up its secret.

They heard the voices of the three men and the sound of their tools before they saw them. They were stooping over something about twenty yards from the edge of the little cliff which Penny and Macbeth had fallen down on their first night at Amorys and where the gorse was still blooming.

David had been right. The ashes were still hot and sometimes, when the breeze disturbed them, they glowed with hidden fire. Jon led them along the narrow track, which only yesterday had been fringed with brambles and nettles. The smoke stung their eyes and made them cough. First to see them was the Major and he waved a grimy hand as Jon hailed him.

"Wanted you all to sleep on. Would have called you as promised if we did find anything. Come over here and you boys can give a hand."

Granpa Crump was now standing up to his chest in an old well about five feet in diameter and throwing up stones and rubbish. He was wearing his miner's helmet and was working in a frenzy as if there was no time to waste. Professor Brown urged him to rest so that he could take a turn.

"What do you expect to find, sir?" Jon asked. "Why is the well filled in and why not let David and me have a go? We're fresh and won't take up as much room in the well."

The Major told them Granpa's story of the collapse of the well when his father was digging it and of his glimpse of what he called a "treasure 'ouse" before his legs were crushed.

"Crump has certainly proved that there is a well, and he admits that when he realized last night that nobody was in Amorys, he decided that the quickest way to find traces of it was to set fire to the spinney. He was probably right. When we get a little deeper the Professor suggests that whoever is digging should be roped round the waist in case the well collapses again or the rubble falls into what is probably a cave between here and the edge of the cliff."

"What's in the cave?" Penny asked quietly as she remembered her dream. "I think I know but please tell me."

Professor Brown, who was now helping Granpa out of the well turned and smiled at her.

"The Major told me of your dream, my dear. It is remarkable because you described a Mithraic temple and that is what we hope to find here. It is also astonishing because the worship of Mithras was exclusively for men and you may have seen in a dream what no other woman has ever witnessed."

Penny looked puzzled and unhappy. A treasure was not important to her and there was still something about her dream and the atmosphere of Amorys that frightened her. Perhaps the discovery of this ancient place of mysteries would break the spell?

Granpa Crump hauled himself out of the hole, took off his helmet and flopped down on a pile of the rubble which he had helped to throw out. His face was dripping with perspiration and he was very pale. He seemed not to notice the Lone Piners but sat with his head in his hands.

David then offered to take a turn, pointing out that he was smaller than Jon and would not take up as much room in the well. The Professor, who had taken charge of the operation, agreed provided David was roped round the waist and held by one of the others. He slid over the edge as Jon took the end of the rope, and the others were ordered to stand back in case the sides of the hole caved in again. Nobody had much to say as David began to fling up the bigger stones and then shovel soil into two pails which were hauled up on ropes. It was a slow and primitive method of digging for treasure, but they were all excited and the occasion even silenced the twins who edged slowly forward until they could see into the hole which was now nearly six feet deep. They noticed that the sides of the well still showed the marks left by Granpa Crump's father and the master well-digger who was killed in this very place so many years ago. The state of these walls proved, of course, that the collapse had occurred many feet lower.

"I've had enough," David called. "Time for Jon to take a turn although I seem to have dealt with all the big rocks. Just my luck. Haul me up, please."

The Major helped to pull as David leaned back against the rope with his feet on the side of the well and began to climb up. Suddenly he shouted a warning as the soil on which he had been standing began to slide away as if it was slipping down a funnel. Professor Brown pushed the twins back, and leaning over the well stretched down until he could grasp David's wrists and pull him up to safety.

"All get back now," he ordered as Granpa, still looking dazed and exhausted, stumbled forward to see what was happening. Then followed a crack, as if something had given way, a roar of falling rubble and a cloud of dust like smoke rose out of the well.

The following silence was broken first by the sound of pebbles dropping, then by a hysterical laugh from Granpa and finally by Dickie who said, "Great Jiminy Cricket! I bet we've found the treasure 'ouse!"

When the dust had settled, the Professor crawled to the edge and looked over. The others waited without speaking although Granpa was breathing noisily as if he had just run a race. Then Professor Brown got up and said:

"I think we've found it. There is a big opening in the side of the well nearest the cliff. I don't know what has been blocking it for many years, but our digging must have disturbed it and no doubt there's a big pile of rubble on the floor of that cave."

Penny felt slightly dizzy. Here they were standing round a hole in the ground in England in the morning sunshine and about to discover a temple which had not been entered by any human being for over a thousand years. The place might be full of such horrors as skeletons, which ought to be allowed to rest in peace, or there might be found some treasure which would make life more agreeable for the old Major who had suffered so much. Perhaps the temple, which might sooner or later become a place of pilgrimage, would turn out to be the most amazing archaeological discovery made in Britain for hundreds of years? And it might not be a temple. Just a cave. She felt that all this did not really matter very much. Of course it was exciting to discover something that had existed for hundreds and hundreds of years, but people today were more important to Penny. On the other side of the well, Jon was helping David to get rid of the rope and they were saying something she could not hear. Then Jon looked up and flashed her a smile that made her feel better, and the two boys came round and stood beside her as the Professor asked Major Bolshaw if he might go down into the cave first to see if it was safe for others to follow.

He borrowed Granpa's helmet and the Major's big electric lamp, knotted the rope round his waist and was lowered into the well by Bolshaw, David and Jon. They saw him disappear into the dark hole through which so much rubble had poured, and after a few seconds the rope went slack.

"Hold on to the rope," the Major warned. "I don't expect there's another way out. It will be harder to haul him up than to let him down. What we want is a ladder. Got an old one somewhere. Can you hear him yet?"

Jon pulled the rope gently, and when he had hauled in about two feet of it, he realized that Brown had freed himself of it while he explored the cave.

Then they heard him shout excitedly:

"Looks like the most perfect Mithraic temple in Europe! We want more lights and a ladder too because it's a steep drop down. The air is clear and the walls and floor are dry. Congratulations, Bolshaw. Come down on the rope yourself and see. You're going to have experts from all over the world coming to Amorys to see this."

They looked at each other in silence. Granpa, still sitting on the pile of rubble with his chin in his grimy hands, did not seem to have grasped what had happened, while Jon hauled in the rope and looked across at the Major.

"You going down, sir? We can get you up easily enough."

Bolshaw was looking at Penny.

"You should go down next, Penelope. Do you dare to see if it is like your dream? Do you dare to be the first woman ever to go into a Mithraic temple? Why shouldn't you. If you hadn't come limping into my old life a few days ago somebody else might have got his hands on this treasure. Will you go down?"

"Yes, I'll go. I shall hate it but I'll do it. Do you think that a woman will raise the ghosts again? It's an honour for me to be asked but do you think the Professor will mind, and it's no good you looking at me like that, Jon. I wish you were coming too but I will go alone."

Penny was light and not afraid of a rope, and the drop through the hole in the wall of the well on to a pile of rubble was not more than six feet. The Professor, warned by Bolshaw, caught her in his arms as she swung down into the cold darkness.

"Brave girl," he said. "You're making history. Until we get more lights we shan't see all the wonders of this place, but you must tell me if it's like your dream... Look this way. Towards the altar."

He swung the beam of the big torch, and she saw that she was again at one end of a stone chamber looking up a central aisle to an arch. It smelled

musty and was so cold that her teeth began to chatter. *She had seen this place before and was very much afraid.* The Professor loosened the rope from her waist and then put an arm round her shoulders as her father would have done.

"Brave girl," he said again. "Is this the place you saw in your dream?"

She nodded in the dark, not trusting her voice.

"Very well. You will have seen more than I have perhaps. See the torch bearers?" and he swung the beam from side to side of the arch, so that she saw again the great statues standing sinister and motionless as they had stood through the centuries. It was odd too that when she had seen them in her dream she had thought they were holding weapons. But of course they were torches as she could see now.

He led her forward under the arch and she shivered as the stone floor struck cold through her sandals. The beam of his torch cast weird, looming shadows that moved silently away from them, and it picked out a stone altar like a pedestal.

"There is one like that in the church at Stone, only about a mile away," the Professor whispered. "Now look above it, for whatever other treasures we may find here, what you will now see is above all price."

Penny knew what she was going to see. The beam of the torch slashed through the darkness and lit up a huge tablet of stone which seemed to glow with hidden fire. She knew that she was going to see the figure of the young, virile god wearing a conical cap and holding in his hand a great knife as he knelt on the back of a prostrate bull.

She turned away. "I want to go back to the others, please. I've seen this before. I hate it."

"I'm sorry, my dear. There is nothing to fear. The religion of Mithras was not evil in itself and it was conquered in Britain by Christianity. I'll tell you about it one day... See here. Before you came down I picked this up. It is a tripod which once held a golden bowl. It is made of gold too. In the hollow



in the top of the stone altar where incense once burned is a pile of gold coins, but before anything else is moved or touched it must be photographed. You have helped to discover what I believe may be the most important Roman archaeological treasure in Europe... We will go up now."

They went back to the pile of rubble under the well and the Professor shouted that they were coming up. While he was fixing the rope under her arms, she said, "I don't feel like talking about this when I get back to the others, but there's one thing I want to ask you. It's all just like my dream except that I was just suddenly there. I didn't come down a well and I can't see how the men got in here. There's no entrance."

"It would have been in the face of the cliff below where your twins made their fort. Bolshaw showed me where that was before we started work on the well... Tug on the rope now to warn them you're coming up and try not to touch the sides of the hole when you go through. And don't kick the wall of the well too hard either. We don't want another fall... Now they're ready. Up you go," and he put his hands on her waist and to her astonishment lifted her as if she had been as light as Mary. Almost before she realized what had happened she was through the gap and out in the blessed sunshine. Jon was kneeling on the edge of the well and his strong hands closed round her wrists as she let go the rope and he lifted her up.

\* \* \*

There is not much more to tell. As soon as the Professor had been hauled up, he announced that he was driving off to Rye to telephone London for some of his assistants, photographers and other experts.

He begged that nobody else should go down the well until he returned, because he feared that more of it might easily collapse. And to Granpa Crump, whose story he had heard last night, he said, "We're trusting you not to say a word of this discovery to anyone, Mr. Crump, and I'd like to thank you for your help. You and the Major will have to decide how to get rid of those three villains at your inn. Tell them what you like, if they haven't escaped already, but keep them away from here. *Nobody* is to be told yet. Nobody. We shall have to guard Amorys day and night, but it won't be long before Oxney is in the news and that should help you. You will be able to

pick and choose your guests and some of my helpers may want putting up tonight."

Granpa got up and solemnly shook hands with him.

"It will be a pleasure, sir, and now that you've proved my old dad right maybe, with that daughter-in-law o' mine, we could do a bit better up at the Smuggler's... And this is a good day for you too, Major. Good luck to you. 'Tis time you had some. I always believed what my dad wrote in the letter and I would 'ave liked to be the first to find the treasure 'ouse 'e saw but maybe it's turned out for the best. I'm with you now and I'll be right glad to see it when you can get a ladder and show me round. No ropes for me. I reckon I'd better be getting back to the inn to see what's been happening."

The twins thought this was very funny but they did not tell him what had happened after he had escaped from his attic prison. They suddenly realized that they were hungry.

"Breakfast," Dickie suggested. "That's what we need. Nice frizzy bacon. Lovely soft eggs. Toast thick with butter and honey. Can't understand why somebody didn't think of it before."

But the Professor would not wait for breakfast and drove off immediately. It was then that David reminded Jon that he was still in possession of a stolen car and that he had better drive it back to the Smuggler's Rest and take Granpa with him.

"Shall we all go in triumph and see what's happened to old Ballinger and that revolting fat boy?" Mary suggested. "We could take a snack with us and then enjoy our breakfast when we get back."

"I'm not going back there, thank you very much," Penny said. "I feel like being fussed over here. Granpa can have breakfast with us while I tell you all what that temple looks like, and then Jon can drive him back to the inn."

Before she had finished speaking however, Macbeth began to bark and they looked round to see Les Dale limping towards them.

"After him, Mackie!" Dickie ordered and as the little dog streaked down the drive, Les turned and fled and only just closed the gate into the lane in time.

"Call the dog off," the Major said sharply. "I want a word with that young man. Drive his car down to him, please Jonathan, and you, Crump, had better go back with him to your own people and look after your affairs. You don't need me to tell you that the sooner you get rid of this man and his accomplices the better. It will be my pleasure to tell him so now."

They all moved to do his bidding, because Major Antony Bolshaw was now speaking with authority. The twins and David ran ahead, and while the latter grabbed Macbeth, Dickie opened the gate and put out his tongue at the fuming Dale who was looking much the worse for wear. Meanwhile Granpa got into the car which Jon drove slowly down the drive. Very reluctantly Penny followed with the Major. She did not want to see Dale again and yet she wanted to be with the others.

He was white and shaking with rage as Jon stopped the car and got out, but before he could speak Granpa put his head out of the window and said, "Save your breath, Dale. There's nuthin' here for you. You've lost, mate. Take me back to the Rest and then get out and stay out."

Jon was not and never had been vindictive. He had never liked rows and often went out of his way to avoid them, but he now looked at Dale's bruised face with satisfaction. Then he tossed him the car key as the Major snapped, "My last word to you, Dale. Advise you to heed it. If you and your friends are not out of this district within half an hour I'll put the police on you. Get moving," and then to the old man he said, "Come and see me when you've got your place cleaned up. There'll be plenty of ways for you to help us. Fresh start for us all."

"Thankee, sir. I will that," said Granpa Crump as if he meant it.

Les Dale got into the driving seat. He looked at Penny but he spoke to Jon who could only just hear him.

"I'm sorry," he said. "Sorry about her. Tell her I'm sorry she got hurt."

Then he slammed the door and drove out of their lives.

"Well now," said Dickie. "What about breakfast?"

His suggestion received unanimous approval.